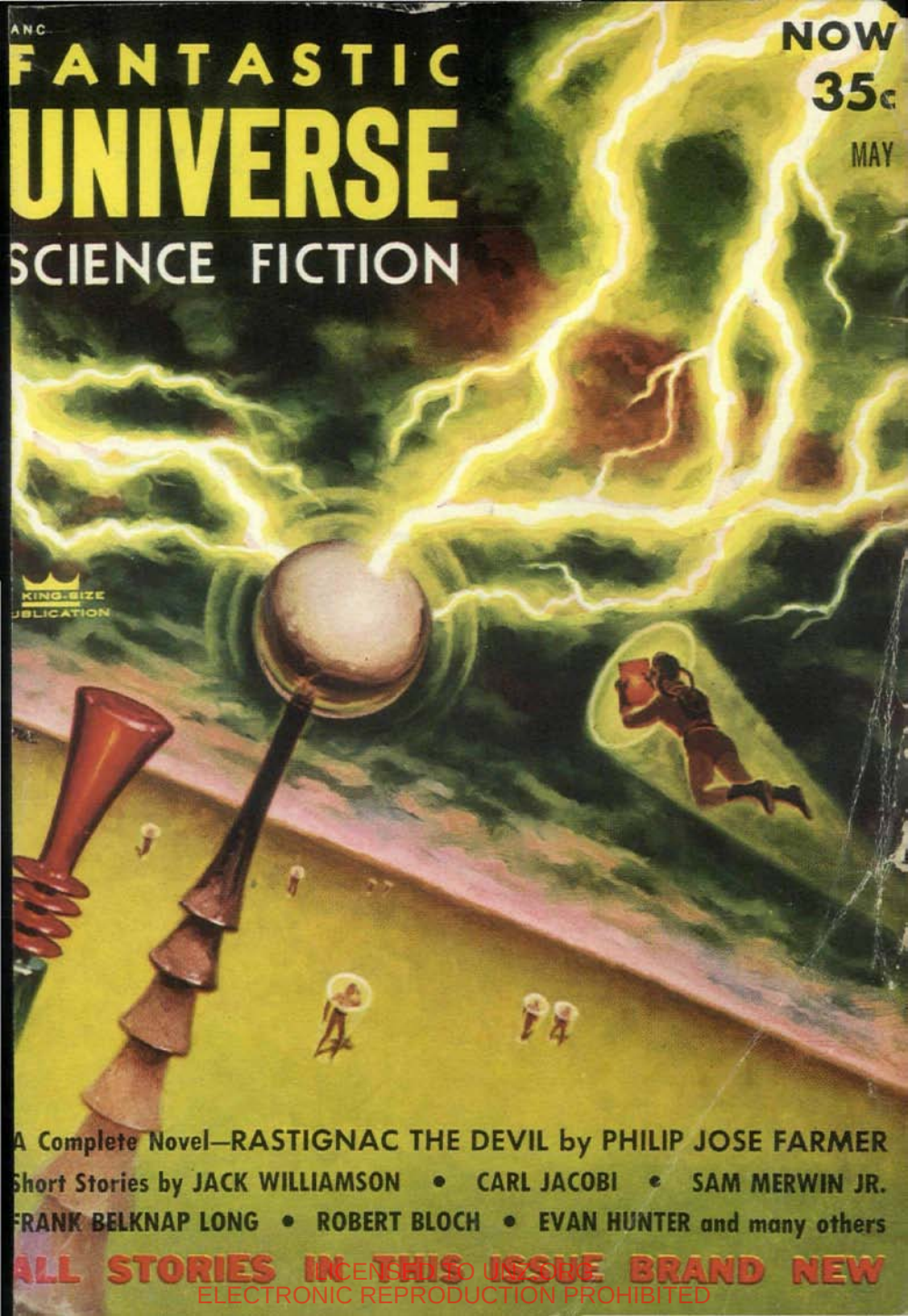

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THE NEW AND THE OLD

There's a dividing line between the new and the old—science fiction as it was a decade ago, and the science fiction of today. As an early practitioner I feel that I have in a sense grown up with it, and am in a position to shed a little light on how an author feels when much of his carefully furrowed domain has been ploughed up and re-seeded directly under him.

I would say that there have been in general three rather fluidly divided periods in science fiction. The fathers of science fiction were two solitary titans of outstanding originality and literary skill—H. G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon.

In England at the turn of the century the literary stature of Wells alone gave dignity and sweep and grandeur to the genre, and to my mind THE TIME MACHINE, THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, and THE FOOD OF THE GODS still remain masterpieces of their kind. About THE TIME MACHINE especially there hovers an aura of high-poetry which has never been surpassed in a science fiction novel.

In America science fiction started thirty years ago as a pulp magazine stepchild, and slowly grew in stature until the moulders of our literary climate were compelled to take it seriously.

But even in the second, pulp magazine stage many outstanding stories managed to get themselves written. Today science fiction has split up into two divergent schools, with a good many revolving classrooms where its practitioners may gravitate back and forth at will.

One school has no patience at all with either the Wellsian approach, or the science fiction of the pulp magazine era. The fact that science fiction has "grown up" is continually stressed. A modern science fiction story should put the accent on adult characterization, realistic situations, realizable science.

The second school is more eclectic. In the main it agrees that science fiction has taken a tremendous step forward in recent years. But it is a little alarmed by the self-conscious way certain current practitioners of the art flap their bright new wings. There is a tendency to stress flippancy, staccato dialogue, and an over-specialized approach to their themes—in a far too studied attempt to be mature. These qualities are all right in themselves when genuinely experienced and realized. But the second school believes that science fiction should be broader in scope, should stress above all man's sense of awe and mystery and wonder in the presence of the unknown.

It knows that the great stories do not become dated—that fashions and vogues do not invalidate the power implicit in strong story-telling. It keeps its sights on the eternal—and remembers H. G. Wells.

FRANK BELKNAP LONG.

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

MAY 1954
Vol. 1, No. 6

Rastignac the Devil 2
by Philip José Farmer

A World Apart 45
by Sam Merwin Jr.

The Hitch-Hiker's Package 62
by Jack Williamson

The Calm Man 68
by Frank Belknap Long

Rex Ex Machina 81
by Frederic Max

Survey Team 84
by Philip K. Dick

Made in Tanganyika 95
by Carl Jacobi

When Day is Dun 106
by Richard Matheson

Year of the Big Thaw 110
by Marion Zimmer Bradley

The Goddess of Wisdom 117
by Robert Bloch

Moon Mad 129
by Evan Hunter

Reel Life Films 134
by Jacques Jean Ferrat

Where the World is Quiet 141
by C. H. Liddell

Universe in Books 157
by Robert Frazier

H. L. Herbert
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Clarence Doore
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rastignac the devil

by . . . Philip José Farmer

Enslaved by a triangular powered despotism—one lone man sets his sights to the Six Bright Stars and eventual freedom of his world.

AFTER THE APOCALYPTIC War, the decimated remnants of the French huddled in the Loire Valley were gradually squeezed between two new and growing nations. The Colossus to the north was unfriendly and obviously intended to absorb the little New France. The Colossus to the south was friendly and offered to take the weak state into its confederation of republics as a full partner.

A number of proud and independent French citizens feared that even the latter alternative meant the eventual transmutation of their tongue, religion and nationality into those of their southern neighbor. Seeking a way of salvation, they built six huge space-ships that would hold thirty thousand people, most of whom would be in deep freeze until they reached their destination. The six vessels then set off into interstellar space to find a planet that would be as much like Earth as possible.

That was in the 22nd Century. Over three hundred and fifty years passed before Earth heard of them again. However, we are not here concerned with the home world but with the story of a man of that pioneer group who wanted

Here is high fidelity fiction at Philip José Farmer's story-telling best. It's a vibrant, distractingly different tale of three centuries into the future. And as you read you'll have a vague, uneasy feeling that it's all taking place somewhere in the unexplored parts of the universe, even today.

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to leave the New Gaul and sail again to the stars . . .

Rastignac had no Skin. He was, nevertheless, happier than he had been since the age of five.

He was as happy as a man can be who lives deep under the ground. Underground organizations are often under the ground. They are formed into cells. Cell Number One usually contains the leader of the underground.

Jean-Jacques Rastignac, chief of the Legal Underground of the Kingdom of L'Bawpfey, was literally in a cell beneath the surface of the earth. He was in jail.

For a dungeon, it wasn't bad. He had two cells. One was deep inside the building proper, built into the wall so that he could sit in it when he wanted to retreat from the sun or the rain. The adjoining cell was at the bottom of a well whose top was covered with a grille of thin steel bars. Here he spent most of his waking hours. Forced to look upwards if he wanted to see the sky or the stars, Rastignac suffered from a chronic stiff neck.

Several times during the day he had visitors. They were allowed to bend over the grille and talk down to him. A guard, one of the King's mucketeers,* stood by as a censor.

When night came, Rastignac ate the meal let down by ropes on a platform. Then another of the King's mucketeers stood by with drawn épée until he had finished eating. When the tray was pulled back up and the grille lowered and locked, the mucketeer marched off with the turnkey.

Rastignac sharpened his wit by calling a few choice insults to the night guard, then went into the cell inside the wall and lay down to take a nap. Later, he would rise and pace back and forth like a caged tiger. Now and then he would stop and look upwards, scan the stars, hunch his shoulders and resume his savage circuit of the cell. But the time would come when he would stand statue-still. Nothing moved except his head, which turned slowly.

"Some day I'll ride to the stars with you."

He said it as he watched the Six Flying Stars speed across the night sky—six glowing stars that moved in a direction opposite to the march of the other stars. Bright as Sirius seen from Earth, strung out one behind the other like jewels on a velvet string, they hurtled across the heavens.

They were the six ships on which the original Loire Valley Frenchmen had sailed out into space, seeking a home on a new planet. They had been put into an orbit around New Gaul and left there while their thirty thousand passengers had descended to the surface in chemical-fuel

* Mucketeer is the best translation of the 26th century French noun *foutriquet*, pronounced *vfeutwikey*.

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rockets. Mankind, once on the fair and fresh earth of the new planet, had never again ascended to re-visit the great ships.

For three hundred years the six ships had circled the planet known as New Gaul, nightly beacons and glowing reminders to Man that he was a stranger on this planet.

When the Earthmen landed on the new planet they had called the new land *Le Beau Pays,* or, as it was now pronounced, *L'Bawpfey*—The Beautiful Country. They had been delighted, entranced with the fresh new land. After the burned, war-racked Earth they had just left, it was like coming to Heaven.

They found two intelligent species living on the planet, and they found that the species lived in peace and that they had no conception of war or of poverty. And they were quite willing to receive the Terrans into their society.

Provided, that is, they became integrated, or—as they phrased it—natural. The Frenchmen from Earth had been given their choice. They were told:

"You can live with the people of the Beautiful Land on our terms—war with us, or leave to seek another planet."

The Terrans conferred. Half of them decided to stay; the other half decided to remain only long enough to mine uranium and other chemicals. Then they would voyage onwards.

But nobody from that group of Earthmen ever again stepped into the ferry-rockets and soared up to the six ion-beam ships circling about Le Beau Pays. All succumbed to the Philosophy of the Natural. Within a few generations a stranger landing upon the planet would not have known without previous information that the Terrans were not aboriginal.

He would have found three species. Two were warm-blooded egglayers who had evolved directly from reptiles without becoming mammals—the Ssassarors and the Amphibs. Somewhere in their dim past—like all happy nations, they had no history—they had set up their society and been very satisfied with it since.

It was a peaceful quiet world, largely peasant, where nobody had to scratch for a living and where a superb manipulation of biological forces ensured very long lives, no disease, and a social lubrication that left little to desire—from their viewpoint, anyway.

The government was, nominally, a monarchy. The Kings were elected by the people and were a different species than the group each ruled. Ssassaror ruled Human, and vice versa, each assisted by foster-brothers and sisters of the race over which they reigned. These were the so-called Dukes and Duchesses.

The Chamber of Deputies—*L'Syawp t' Tapfuti*—was half Human and half Ssassaror. The

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so-called Kings took turns presiding over the Chamber for forty day intervals. The Deputies were elected for ten-year terms by constituents who could not be deceived about their representatives' purposes because of the sensitive Skins which allowed them to determine their true feelings and worth.

In one custom alone did the ex-Terrans differ from their neighbors. This was in carrying arms. In the beginning, the Ssassaror had allowed the Men to wear their short rapiers, so they would feel safe even though in the midst of aliens.

As time went on, only the King's mucketeers—and members of the official underground—were allowed to carry épées. These men, it might be noticed, were the congenital adventurers, men who needed to swashbuckle and revel in the name of individualist.

Like the egg-stealers, they needed an institution in which they could work off anti-social steam.

From the beginning the Amphibians had been a little separate from the Ssassaror and when the Earthmen came they did not get any more neighborly. Nevertheless, they preserved excellent relations and they, too, participated in the Changeling-custom.

This Changeling-custom was another social device set up millenia ago to keep a mutual understanding between all species on the planet. It was a peculiar institution, one that the Earthmen had found hard to understand and ever more difficult to adopt. Nevertheless, once the Skins had been accepted they had changed their attitude, forgot their speculations about its origin and threw themselves into the custom of stealing babies—or eggs—from another race and raising the children as their own.

You rob my cradle; I'll rob yours. Such was their motto, and it worked.

A Guild of Egg Stealers was formed. The Human branch of it guaranteed, for a price, to bring you a Ssassaror child to replace the one that had been stolen from you. Or, if you lived on the seashore, and an Amphibian had crept into your nursery and taken your baby—always under two years old, according to the rules—then the Guildsman would bring you an Amphib or, perhaps, the child of a Human Changeling reared by the Seafolk.

You raised it and loved it as your own. How could you help loving it?

Your Skin told you that it was small and helpless and needed you and was, despite appearances, as Human as any of your babies. Nor did you need to worry about the one that had been abducted. It was getting just as good care as you were giving this one.

It had never occurred to anyone to quit the stealing and voluntary exchange of babies. Perhaps that

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was because it would strain even the loving nature of the Skin-wearers to give away their own flesh and blood. But once the transfer had taken place, they could adapt.

Or perhaps the custom was kept because tradition is stronger than law in a peasant-monarchy society and also because egg-and-baby stealing gave the more naturally aggressive and daring citizens a chance to work off anti-social behavior.

Nobody but a historian would have known, and there were no historians in The Beautiful Land.

Long ago the Ssassaror had discovered that if they lived meatless, they had a much easier time curbing their belligerency, obeying the Skins and remaining cooperative. So they induced the Earthmen to put a taboo on eating flesh. The only drawback to the meatless diet was that both Ssassaror and Man became as stunted in stature as they did in aggressiveness, the former so much so that they barely came to the chins of the Humans. These, in turn, would have seemed short to a Western European.

But Rastignac, an Earthman, and his good friend, Mapfarity, the Ssassaror Giant, became taboo-breakers when they were children and played together on the beach where they first ate seafood out of curiosity, then continued because they liked it. And due to their protein diet the Terran had grown well over six feet in height and the Ssassaror seemed to have touched off a rocket of expansion in his body with his protein-eating. Those Ssassarors who shared his guilt—became meat-eaters—became ostracized and eventually moved off to live by themselves. They were called Ssassaror-Giants and were pointed to as an object lesson to the young of the normal Ssassarors and Humans on the land.

If a stranger had landed shortly before Rastignac was born, however, he would have noticed that all was not as serene as it was supposed to be among the different species. The cause for the flaw in the former Eden might have puzzled him if he had not known the previous history of *L'Bawfey* and the fact that the situation had not changed for the worst until the introduction of Human Changelings among the Amphibians.

Then it had been that blood-drinking began among them, that Amphibians began seducing Humans to come live with them by their tales of easy immortality, and that they started the system of leaving savage little carnivores in the Human nurseries.

When the Land-dwellers protested, the Amphibs replied that these things were carried out by unnaturals or outlaws, and that the Sea-King could not be held responsible. Permission was given

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to Chalice those caught in such behavior.

Nevertheless, the suspicion remained that the Amphib monarch had, in accordance with age-old procedure, given his unofficial official blessing and that he was preparing even more disgusting and outrageous and unnatural moves. Through his control of the populace by the Master Skin, he would be able to do as he pleased with their minds.

It was the Skins that had made the universal peace possible on the planet of New Gaul. And it would be the custom of the Skins that would make possible the change from peace to conflict among the populace.

Through the artificial Skins that were put on all babies at birth—and which grew with them, attached to their body, feeding from their bloodstreams, their nervous systems—the Skins, controlled by a huge Master Skin that floated in a chemical vat in the palace of the rulers, fed, indoctrinated and attended day and night by a crew of the most brilliant scientists of the planet, gave the Kings complete control of the minds and emotions of the inhabitants of the planet.

Originally the rulers of New Gaul had desired only that the populace live in peace and enjoy the good things of their planet equally. But the change that had b e e n coming gradually—the growth of conflict between the Kings of the different species for control of the whole populace—was beginning to be generally felt. Uneasiness, distrust of each other was growing among the people. Hence the legalizing of the Underground, the Philosophy of Violence by the government, an effort to control the revolt that was brewing.

Yet, the Land-dwellers had managed to take no action at all and to ignore the growing number of vicious acts.

But not all were content to drowse. One man was aroused. He was Rastignac.

They were Rastignac's hope, those Six Stars, the gods to which he prayed. When they passed quickly out of his sight he would continue his pacing, meditating for the twenty-thousandth time on a means for reaching one of those ships and using it to visit the stars. The end of his fantasies was always a curse because of the futility of such hopes. He was doomed! Mankind was doomed!

And it was all the more maddening because Man would not admit that he was through. Ended, that is, as a human being.

Man was changing into something not quite *homo sapiens*. It might be a desirable change, but it would mean the finish of his climb upwards. So it seemed to Rastignac. And he, being the man he was, had decided to do some-

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thing about it even if it meant violence.

That was why he was now in the well-dungeon. He was an advocator of violence against the status quo.

II

There was another cell next to his. It was also at the bottom of a well and was separated from his by a thin wall of cement. A window had been set into it so that the prisoners could talk to each other. Rastignac did not care for the woman who had been let down into the adjoining cell, but she was somebody to talk to.

"Amphib-changelings" was the name given to those human beings who had been stolen from their cradles and raised among the non-humanoid Amphibians as their own. The girl in the adjoining cell, Lusine, was such a person. It was not her fault that she was a blood-drinking Amphib. Yet he could not help disliking her for what she had done and for the things she stood for.

She was in prison because she had been caught in the act of stealing a Man child from its cradle. This was no crime, but she had left in the cradle, under the covers, a savage and bloodthirsty little monster that had leaped up and slashed the throat of the unsuspecting baby's mother.

Her cell was lit by a cageful of glowworms. Rastignac, peering through the grille, could see her shadowy shape in the inner cell inside the wall. She rose langorously and stepped into the circle of dim orange light cast by the insects.

"B'zhu, m'fweh," she greeted him.

It annoyed him that she called him her brother, and it annoyed him even more to know that she knew it. It was true that she had some excuse for thus addressing him. She did resemble him. Like him, she had straight glossy blue-black hair, thick bracket-shaped eyebrows, brown eyes, a straight nose and a prominent chin. And where his build was superbly masculine, hers was magnificently feminine.

Nevertheless, this was not her reason for so speaking to him. She knew the disgust the Land-walker had for the Amphib-changeling, and she took a perverted delight in baiting him.

He was proud that he seldom allowed her to see that she annoyed him. *"B'zhu, fam tey zafeep,"* he said. "Good evening, woman of the Amphibians."

Mockingly she said, "Have you been watching the Six Flying Stars, Jean-Jacques?"

"Vi. I do so every time they come over."

"Why do you eat your heart out because you cannot fly up to them and then voyage among the stars on one of them?"

He refused to give her the satisfaction of knowing his real reason.

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He did not want her to realize how little he thought of Mankind and its chances for surviving—as humanity—upon the face of this planet, L'Bawpfey.

"I look at them because they remind me that Man was once captain of his soul."

"Then you admit that the Landwalker is weak?"

"I think he is on the way to becoming non-human, which is to say that he is weak, yes. But what I say about Landman goes for Seaman, too. You Changelings are becoming more Amphibian every day and less Human. Through the Skins the Amphibs are gradually changing you completely. Soon you will be completely sea-people."

She laughed scornfully, exposing perfect white teeth as she did so.

"The Sea will win out against the Land. It launches itself against the shore and shakes it with the crash of its body. It eats away the rock and the dirt and absorbs it into its own self. It can't be worn away nor caught and held in a net. It is elusive and all-powerful and never-tiring."

Lusine paused for breath. He said, "That is a very pretty analogy, but it doesn't apply. You Seafolk are as much flesh and blood as we Landfolk. What hurts us hurts you."

She put a hand around one bar. The glow-light fell upon it in such a way that it showed plainly the webbing of skin between her fingers. He glanced at it with a faint repulsion under which was a counter-current of attraction. This was the hand that had, indirectly, shed blood.

She glanced at him sidewise, challenged him in trembling tones. "You are not one to throw stones, Jean-Jacques. I have heard that you eat meat."

"Fish, not meat. That is part of my Philosophy of Violence," he retorted. "I maintain that one of the reasons man is losing his power and strength is that he has so long been upon a vegetable diet. He is as cowed and submissive as the grass-eating beast of the fields."

Lusine put her face against the bars.

"That is interesting," she said. "But how did you happen to begin eating fish? I thought we Amphibs alone did that."

What Lusine had just said angered him. He had no reply.

Rastignac knew he should not be talking to a Sea-changeling. They were glib and seductive and always searching for ways to twist your thoughts. But being Rastignac, he had to talk. Moreover, it was so difficult to find anybody who would listen to his ideas that he could not resist the temptation.

"I was given fish by the Ssassaror, Mapfarity, when I was a child. We lived along the seashore. Mapfarity was a child, too, and we played together. 'Don't

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eat fish!' my parents said. To me that meant 'Eat it!' So, despite my distaste at the idea, and my squeamish stomach, I did eat fish. And I liked it. And as I grew to manhood I adopted the Philosophy of Violence and I continued to eat fish although I am not a Changeling."

"What did your Skin do when it detected you?" Lusine asked. Her eyes were wide and luminous with wonder and a sort of glee as if she relished the confession of his sins. Also, he knew, she was taunting him about the futility of his ideas of violence so long as he was a prisoner of the Skin.

He frowned in annoyance at the reminder of the Skin. Much thought had he given, in a weak way, to the possibility of life without the Skin.

Ashamed now of his weak resistance to the Skin, he blustered a bit in front of the teasing Amphib girl.

"Mapfarity and I discovered something that most people don't know," he answered boastfully. "We found that if you can stand the shocks your Skin gives you when you do something wrong, the Skin gets tired and quits after a while. Of course your Skin recharges itself and the next time you eat fish it shocks you again. But after very many shocks it becomes accustomed, forgets its conditioning, and leaves you alone."

Lusine laughed and said in a low conspirational tone, "So your Ssassaror pal and you adopted the Philosophy of Violence because you remained fish and meat eaters?"

"Yes, we did. When Mapfarity reached puberty he became a Giant and went off to live in a castle in the forest. But we have remained friends through our connection in the underground."

"Your parents must have suspected that you were a fish eater when you first proposed your Philosophy of Violence?" she said.

"Suspicion isn't proof," he answered. "But I shouldn't be telling you all this, Lusine. I feel it is safe for me to do so only because you will never have a chance to tell on me. You will soon be taken to Chalice and there you will stay until you have been cured."

She shivered and said, "This Chalice? What is it?"

"It is a place far to the north where both Terrans and Ssassarors send their incorrigibles. It is an extinct volcano whose steep-sided interior makes an inescapable prison. There those who have persisted in unnatural behavior are given special treatment."

"They are bled?" she asked, her eyes widening as her tongue flicked over her lips again hungrily.

"No. A special breed of Skin is given them to wear. These Skins shock them more powerfully than the ordinary ones, and the shocks are associated with the

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habit they are trying to cure. The shocks effect a cure. Also, these special Skins are used to detect hidden unnatural emotions. They re-condition the deviate. The result is that when the Chaliced Man is judged able to go out and take his place in society again, he is thoroughly re-conditioned. Then his regular Skin is given back to him and it has no trouble keeping him in line from then on. The Chaliced Man is a very good citizen."

"And what if a revolter doesn't become Chaliced?"

"Then he stays in Chalice until he decides to become so."

Her voice rose sharply as she said, "But if I go there, and I am not fed the diet of the Amphibs, I will grow old and die!"

"No. The government will feed you the diet you need until you are re-conditioned. Except . . ." He paused.

"Except I won't get blood," she wailed. Then, realizing she was acting undignified before a Landman, she firmed her voice.

"The King of the Amphibians will not allow them to do this to me," she said. "When he hears of it he will demand my return. And if the King of Men refuses, my King will use violence to get me back."

Rastignac smiled and said, "I hope he does. Then perhaps my people will wake up and get rid of their Skins and make war upon your people."

"So that is what you Philosophers of Violence want, is it? Well, you will not get it. My father, the Amphib King, will not be so stupid as to declare a war."

"I suppose not," replied Rastignac. "He will send a band to rescue you. If they're caught they'll claim to be criminals and say they are *not* under the King's orders."

Lusine looked upwards to see if a guard was hanging over the well's mouth listening. Perceiving no one, she nodded and said, "You have guessed it correctly. And that is why we laugh so much at you stupid Humans. You know as well as we do what's going on, but you are afraid to tell us so. You keep clinging to the idea that your turn-the-other-cheek policy will soften us and insure peace."

"Not I," said Rastignac. "I know perfectly well there is only one solution to man's problems. That is—"

"That is Violence," she finished for him. "That is what you have been preaching. And that is why you are in this cell, waiting for trial."

"You don't understand," he said. "Men are not put into the Chalice for *proposing* new philosophies. As long as they behave naturally they may say what they wish. They may even petition the King that the new philosophy be made a law. The King passes it on to the Chamber of Deputies. They consider it and put it up to

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the people. If the people like it, it becomes a law. The only trouble with that procedure is that it may take ten years before the law is considered by the Chamber of Deputies."

"And in those ten years," she mocked him, "the Amphibs and the Amphibian-changelings will have won the planet."

"That is true," he said.

"The King of the Humans is a Ssassaror and the King of the Ssassaror is a Man," said Lusine. "Our King can't see any reason for changing the status quo. After all, it is the Ssassaror who are responsible for the Skins and for Man's position in the sentient society of this planet. Why should he be favorable to a policy of Violence? The Ssassarors loathe violence.

"And so you have preached Violence without waiting for it to become a law? And for that you are now in this cell?"

"Not exactly. The Ssassarors have long known that to suppress too much of Man's naturally belligerent nature only results in an explosion. So they have legalized illegality—up to a point. Thus the King officially made me the Chief of the Underground and gave me a state license to preach—but not practice—Violence. I am even allowed to advocate overthrow of the present system of government—as long as I take no action that is too productive of results.

"I am in jail now because the Minister of Ill-Will put me here. He had my Skin examined, and it was found to be 'unhealthy.' He thought I'd be better off locked up until I became 'healthy' again. But the King . . ."

III

Lusine's laughter was like the call of a silverbell bird. Whatever her unhuman appetites, she had a beautiful voice. She said, "How comical! And how do you, with your brave ideas, like being regarded as a harmless figure of fun, or as a sick man?"

"I like it as well as you would," he growled.

She gripped the bars of her window until the tendons on the back of her long thin hands stood out and the membranes between her fingers stretched like windblown tents. Face twisted, she spat at him, "Coward! Why don't you kill somebody and break out of this ridiculous mold—that Skin that the Ssassarors have poured you into?"

Rastignac was silent. That was a good question. Why didn't he? Killing was the logical result of his philosophy. But the Skin kept him docile. Yes, he could vaguely see that he had purposely shut his eyes to the destination towards which his ideas were slowly but inevitably traveling.

And there was another facet to the answer to her question—if he had to kill, he would not kill a Man. His philosophy was directed

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towards the Amphibians and the Sea-changelings.

He said, "Violence doesn't necessarily mean the shedding of blood, Lusine. My philosophy urges that we take a more vigorous action, that we overthrow some of the bio-social institutions which have imprisoned Man and stripped him of his dignity as an individual."

"Yes, I have heard that you want Man to stop wearing the Skin. That is what has horrified your people, isn't it?"

"Yes," he said. "And I understand it has had the same effect among the Amphibians."

She bridled, her brown eyes flashing in the feeble glowworms' light. "Why shouldn't it? What would we be without our Skins?"

"What, indeed?" he said, laughing derisively afterwards.

Earnestly she said, "You don't understand. We Amphibians—our Skins are not like yours. We do not wear them for the same reason you do. You are imprisoned by your Skins—they tell you how to feel, what to think. Above all, they keep you from getting ideas about non-cooperation or non-integration with Nature as a whole.

"That, to us individualistic Amphibians, is false. The purpose of our Skins is to make sure that our King's subjects understand what he wants so that we may all act as one unit and thus further the progress of the Seafolk."

The first time Rastignac had heard this statement he had howled with laughter. Now, however, knowing that she could not see the fallacy, he did not try to argue the point. The Amphibs were, in their way, as hidebound —no pun intended—as the Landwalkers.

"Look, Lusine," he said, "there are only three places where a Man may take off his Skin. One is in his own home, when he may hang it upon the halltree. Two is when he is, like us, in jail and therefore may not harm anybody. The third is when a man is King. Now you and I have been without our Skins for a week. We have gone longer without them than anybody, except the King. Tell me true, don't you feel free for the first time in your life?

"Don't you feel as if you belong to nobody but yourself, that you are accountable to no one but yourself, and that you love that feeling? And don't you dread the day we will be let out of prison and made to wear our Skins again? That day which, curiously enough, will be the very day that we will lose our freedom."

Lusine looked as if she didn't know what he was talking about.

"You'll see what I mean when we are freed and the Skins are put back upon us," he said. Immediately after, he was embarrassed. He remembered that she would go to the Chalice where one of the heavy and powerful Skins

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used for unnaturals would be fastened to her shoulders.

Lusine did not notice. She was considering the last but most telling point in her argument. "You cannot win against us," she said, watching him narrowly for the effect of her words. "We have a weapon that is irresistible. We have immortality."

His face did not lose its imperturbability.

She continued, "And what is more, we can give immortality to anyone who casts off his Skin and adopts ours. Don't think that your people don't know this. For instance, during the last year more than two thousand Humans living along the beaches deserted and went over to us, the Amphibs."

He was a little shocked to hear this, but he did not doubt her. He remembered the mysterious case of the schooner *Le Pauvre Pierre* which had been found drifting and crewless, and he remembered a conversation he had had with a fisherman in his home port of Marrec.

He put his hands behind his back and began pacing. Lusine continued staring at him through the bars. Despite the fact that her face was in the shadows, he could see—or feel—her smile. He had humiliated her, but she had won in the end.

Rastignac quit his limited roving and called up to the guard.

"Shoo l'footyay, kal u ay tee?"

The guard leaned over the grille. His large hat with its tall wings sticking from the peak was green in the daytime. But now, illuminated only by a far off torchlight and by a glowworm coiled around the band, it was black.

"Ah, shoo Zhaw-Zhawk W'stenyek," he said, loudly. "What time is it? What do you care what time it is?" And he concluded with the stock phrase of the jailer, unchanged through millenia and over light-years. "You're not going any place, are you?"

Rastignac threw his head back to howl at the guard but stopped to wince at the sudden pain in his neck. After uttering, *"Sek Ploo!"* and *"S'pweestee!"* both of which were close enough to the old Terran French so that a language specialist might have recognized them, he said, more calmly, "If you would let me out on the ground, *monsieur le foutriquet,* and give me a good épée, I would show you where I am going. Or, at least, where my sword is going. I am thinking of a nice sheath for it."

Tonight he had a special reason for keeping the attention of the King's mucketeer directed towards himself. So, when the guard grew tired of returning insults—mainly because his limited imagination could invent no new ones—Rastignac began telling jokes. They were broad and aimed at the mucketeer's narrow intellect.

"Then," said Rastignac, "there

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was the itinerant salesman whose *s'fel* threw a shoe. He knocked on the door of the hut of the nearest peasant and said . . ." What was said by the salesman was never known.

A strangled gasp had come from above.

IV

Rastignac saw something enormous blot out the smaller shadow of the guard. Then both figures disappeared. A moment later a silhouette cut across the lines of the grille. Unoiled hinges screeched; the bars lifted. A rope uncoiled from above to fall at Rastignac's feet. He seized it and felt himself being drawn powerfully upwards.

When he came over the edge of the well, he saw that his rescuer was a giant Ssassaror. The light from the glowworm on the guard's hat lit up feebly his face, which was orthagnathous and had quite humanoid eyes and lips. Large canine teeth stuck out from the mouth, and its huge ears were tipped with feathery tufts. The forehead down to the eyebrows looked as if it needed a shave, but Rastignac knew that more light would show the blue-black shade came from many small feathers, not stubbled hair.

"Mapfarity!" Rastignac said. "It's good to see you after all these years!"

The Ssassaror giant put his hand on his friend's shoulder. Clenched, it was almost as big as Rastignac's head. He spoke with a voice like a lion coughing at the bottom of a deep well.

"It is good to see you again, my friend."

"What are you doing here?" said Rastignac, tears running down his face as he stroked the great fingers on his shoulder.

Mapfarity's huge ears quivered like the wings of a bat tied to a rock and unable to fly off. The tufts of feathers at their ends grew stiff and suddenly crackled with tiny sparks.

The electrical display was his equivalent of the human's weeping. Both creatures discharged emotion; their bodies chose different avenues and manifestations. Nevertheless, the sight of the other's joy affected each deeply.

"I have come to rescue you," said Mapfarity. "I caught Archambaud here,"—he indicated the other man—"stealing eggs from my golden goose. And . . ."

Raoul Archambaud—pronounced Wawl Shebvo—interrupted excitedly, "I showed him my license to steal eggs from Giants who were raising counterfeit geese, but he was going to lock me up anyway. He was going to take my Skin off and feed me on meat . . ."

"Meat!" said Rastignac, astonished and revolted despite himself. "Mapfarity, what have you been doing in that castle of yours?"

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Mapfarity lowered his voice to match the distant roar of a cataract. "I haven't been very active these last few years," he said, "because I am so big that it hurts my feet if I walk very much. So I've had much time to think. And I, being logical, decided that the next step after eating fish was eating meat. It couldn't make me any larger. So, I ate meat. And while doing so, I came to the same conclusion that you, apparently, have done independently. That is, the Philosophy of . . ."

"Of Violence," interrupted Archambaud. "Ah, Jean-Jacques, there must be some mystic bond that brings two Humans of such different backgrounds as yours and the Ssassaror together, giving you both the same philosophy. When I explained what you had been doing and that you were in jail because you had advocated getting rid of the Skins, Mapfarity petitioned . . ."

"The King to make an official jail-break," said Mapfarity with an impatient glance at the roly-poly egg-stealer. "And . . ."

"The King agreed," broke in Archambaud, "provided Mapfarity would turn in his counterfeit goose and provided you would agree to say no more about abandoning Skins, but . . ."

The Giant's basso profundo-redundo pushed the egg-stealer's high pitch aside. "If this squeaker will quit interrupting, perhaps we can get on with the rescue. We'll talk later, if you don't mind."

At that moment Lusine's voice floated up from the bottom of her cell. "Jean-Jacques, my love, my brave, my own, would you abandon me to the Chalice? Please take me with you! You will need somebody to hide you when the Minister of Ill-Will sends his mucketeers after you. I can hide you where no one will ever find you." Her voice was mocking, but there was an undercurrent of anxiety to it.

Mapfarity muttered, "She will hide us, yes, at the bottom of a sea-cave where we will eat strange food and suffer a change. Never . . ."

"Trust an Amphib," finished Archambaud for him.

Mapfarity forgot to whisper. *"Bey-t'cul, vu nu fez yey! Fe'm sa!"* he roared.

A shocked hush covered the courtyard. Only Mapfarity's wrathful breathing could be heard. Then, disembodied, Lusine's voice floated from the well.

"Jean-Jacques, do not forget that I am the foster-daughter of the King of the Amphibians! If you were to take me with you, I could assure you of safety and a warm welcome in the halls of the Sea-King's Palace!"

"Pah!" said Mapfarity. "That web-footed witch!"

Rastignac did not reply to her. He took the broad silk belt and the sheathed épée from Archambaud and buckled them around his

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waist. Mapfarity handed him a mucketeer's hat; he clapped that on firmly. Last of all, he took the Skin that the fat egg-stealer had been holding out to him.

For the first time he hesitated. It was his Skin, the one he had been wearing since he was six. It had grown with him, fed off his blood for twenty-two years, clung to him as clothing, censor, and castigator, and parted from him only when he was inside the walls of his own house, went swimming, or, as during the last seven days, when he laid in jail.

A week ago, after they had removed his second Skin, he had felt naked and helpless and cut off from his fellow creatures. But that was a week ago. Since then, as he had remarked to Lusine, he had experienced the birth of a strange feeling. It was, at first, frightening. It made him cling to the bars as if they were the only stable thing in the center of a whirling universe.

Later, when that first giddiness had passed, it was succeeded by another intoxication—the joy of being an individual, the knowledge that he was separate, not a part of a multitude. Without the Skin he could think as he pleased. He did not have a censor.

Now, he was on level ground again, out of the cell. But as soon as he had put that prison-shaft behind him he was faced with the old second Skin.

Archambaud held it out like a cloak in his hands. It looked much like a ragged garment. It was pale and limp and roughly rectangular with four extensions at each corner. When Rastignac put it on his back, it would sink four tiny hollow teeth into his veins and the suckers on the inner surface of its flat body would cling to him. Its long upper extensions would wrap themselves around his shoulders and over his chest; the lower, around his loins and thighs. Soon it would lose its paleness and flaccidity, become pink and slightly convex, pulsing with Rastignac's blood.

V

Rastignac hesitated for a few seconds. Then he allowed the habit of a lifetime to take over. Sighing, he turned his back. In a moment he felt the cold flesh descend over his shoulders and the little bite of the four teeth as they attached the Skin to his shoulders. Then, as his blood poured into the creature he felt it grow warm and strong. It spread out and followed the passages it had long ago been conditioned to follow, wrapped him warmly and lovingly and comfortably. And he knew, though he couldn't feel it, that it was pushing nerves into the grooves along the teeth. Nerves to connect with his.

A minute later he experienced the first of the expected *rapport.* It was nothing that you could put a mental finger on. It was just a

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diffused tingling and then the sudden consciousness of how the others around him *felt*.

They were ghosts in the background of his mind. Yet, pale and ectoplasmic as they were, they were easily identifiable. Mapfarity loomed above the others, a transparent Colossus radiating streamers of confidence in his clumsy strength. A meat-eater, uncertain about the future, with a hope and trust in Rastignac to show him the right way. And with a strong current of anger against the conqueror who had inflicted the Skin upon him.

Archambaud was a shorter phantom, rolypoly even in his psychic manifestations, emitting bursts of impatience because other people did not talk fast enough to suit him, his mind leaping on ahead of their tongues, his fingers wriggling to wrap themselves around something valuable—preferably the eggs of the golden goose—and a general eagerness to be up and about and onwards. He was one round fidget on two legs, yet a good man for any project requiring action.

Faintly, Rastignac detected the slumbering guard as if he were the tendrils of some plant at the sea-bottom, floating in the green twilight, at peace and unconscious.

And even more faintly he felt Lusine's presence, shielded by the walls of the shaft. Hers was a pale and light hand, one whose fingers tapped a barely heard code of impotent rage and voiceless screaming fear. Yet beneath that anguish was a base of confidence and mockery at others. She might be temporarily upset, but when the chance came for her to do something she would seize it with every ability at her command.

Another radiation dipped into the general picture and out. A wild glowworm had swooped over them and disturbed the smooth reflection built up by the Skins.

This was the way the Skins worked. They penetrated into you and found out what you were feeling and emoting, and then they broadcast it to other closeby Skins, which then projected their hosts' psychosomatic responses. The whole was then integrated so that each Skin-wearer could detect the group-feeling and at the same time, though in a much duller manner, the feeling of the individuals of the *gestalt*.

That wasn't the only function of the Skin. The parasite, created in the bio-factories, had several other social and biological uses.

Rastignac almost fell into a reverie at that point. It was nothing unusual. The effect of the Skins was a slowing-down one. The wearer thought more slowly, acted more leisurely, and was much more contented.

But now, by a deliberate wrenching of himself from the feeling-pattern, Rastignac woke up. There were things to do, and standing around and drinking in

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the lotus of the group-rapport was not one of them.

He gestured at the prostrate form of the mucketeer. "You didn't hurt him?"

The Ssassaror rumbled, "No. I scratched him with a little venom of the dream-snake. He will sleep for an hour or so. Besides, I would not be allowed to hurt him. You forget that all this is carefully staged by the King's Official Jail-breaker."

"Me'dt!" swore Rastignac.

Alarmed, Archambaud said, "What's the matter, Jean-Jacques?"

"Can't we do anything on our own? Must the King meddle in everything?"

"You wouldn't want us to take a chance and have to shed *blood,* would you?" breathed Archambaud.

"What are you carrying those swords for? As a decoration?" Rastignac snarled.

"Seelahs, m'fweh," warned Mapfarity. "If you alarm the other guards, you will embarrass them. They will be forced to do their duty and recapture you. And the Jail-breaker would be reprimanded because he had fallen down on his job. He might even get a demotion."

Rastignac was so upset that his Skin, reacting to the negative fields racing over the Skin and the hormone imbalance of his blood, writhed away from his back.

"What are we, a bunch of children playing war?"

Mapfarity growled, "We are all God's children, and we mustn't hurt anyone if we can help it."

"Mapfarity, you eat meat!"

"Voo zavf w'zaw m'fweh," admitted the Giant. "But it is the flesh of unintelligent creatures. I have not yet shed the blood of any being that can talk with the tongue of Man."

Rastignac snorted and said, "If you stick with me you will some day do that, *m'fweh* Mapfarity. There is no other course. It is inevitable."

"Nature spare me the day! But if it comes it will find Mapfarity unafraid. They do not call me Giant for nothing."

Rastignac sighed and walked ahead. Sometimes he wondered if the members of his underground—or anybody else for that matter—ever realized the grim conclusions formed by the Philosophy of Violence.

The Amphibians, he was sure, did. And they were doing something positive about it. But it was the Amphibians who had driven Rastignac to adopt a Philosophy of Violence.

"Law," he said again, "Let's go."

The three of them walked out of the huge courtyard and through the open gate. Nearby stood a short man whose Skin gleamed black-red in the light shed by the two glowworms attached to his

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shoulders. The Skin was oversized and hung to the ground.

The King's man, however, did not think he was a comic figure. He sputtered, and the red of his face matched the color of the skin on his back.

"You took long enough," he said accusingly and then, when Rastignac opened his mouth to protest, the Jail-breaker said, "Never mind, never mind. *Sa n'apawt.* The thing is that we get you away fast. The Minister of Ill-Will has doubtless by now received word that an official jail-break is planned for tonight. He will send a company of his mucketeers to intercept you. By coming in advance of the appointed time we shall have time to escape before the official rescue party arrives."

"How much time do we have?" asked Rastignac.

The King's man said, "Let's see. After I escort you through the rooms of the Duke, the King's foster-brother—he is most favorable to the Violent Philosophy, you know, and has petitioned the King to become your official patron, which petition will be considered at the next meeting of the Chamber of Deputies in three months—let's see, where was I? Ah, yes, I escort you through the rooms of the King's brother. You will be disguised as His Majesty's mucketeers, ostensibly looking for the escaped prisoners. From the rooms of the Duke you will be let out through a small door in the wall of the palace itself. A car will be waiting.

"From then on it will be up to you. I suggest, however, that you make a dash for Mapfarity's castle. Follow the *Rue des Nues;* that is your best chance. The mucketeers have been pulled off that boulevard. However, it is possible that Auverpin, the Ill-Will Minister, may see that order and will rescind it, realizing what it means. If he does, I suppose I will see you back in your cell, Rastignac."

He bowed to the Ssassaror and Archambaud and said, "And you two gentlemen will then be with him."

"And then what?" rumbled Mapfarity.

"According to the law, you will be allowed one more jail-break. Any more after that will, of course, be illegal. That is, unthinkable."

Rastignac unsheathed his épée and slashed it at the air. "Let the mucketeers stand in my way," he said fiercely. "I will cut them down with this!"

The Jail-breaker staggered back, hands outthrust.

"Please, Monsieur Rastignac! Please! Don't even talk about it! You know that your philosophy is, as yet, illegal. The shedding of blood is an act that will be regarded with horror throughout the sentient planet. People would think you are an Amphibian!"

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"The Amphibians know what they're doing far better than we do," answered Rastignac. "Why do you think they're winning against us Humans?"

Suddenly, before anybody could answer, the sound of blaring horns came from somewhere on the ramparts. Shouts went up; drums began to beat, calling the mucketeers to alert.

And above it all came the roar of a giant Ssassaror voice: *An Earthship has landed in the sea! And the pilot of the ship is in the hands of the Amphibians!"*

As the meaning of the words seeped into Rastignac's consciousness he made a sudden violent movement—and began to tear the Skin from his body!

VI

Rastignac ran down the steps, out into the courtyard. He seized the Jail-breaker's arm and demanded the key to the grilles. Dazed, the white-faced official meekly and silently handed it to him. Without his Skin Rastignac was no longer fearfully inhibited. If you were forceful enough and did not behave according to the normal pattern you could get just about anything you wanted. The average Man or Ssassaror did not know how to react to his violence. By the time they had recovered from their confusion he could be miles away.

Such a thought flashed through his head as he ran towards the prison wells. At the same time he heard the horn-blasts of the king's mucketeers and knew that he shortly would have a different type of Man to deal with. The mucketeers, closest approach to soldiers in this pacifistic land, wore Skins that conditioned them to be more belligerent than the common citizen. They carried épées and, while it was true that their points were dull and their wielders had never engaged in serious swordsmanship, the mucketeers could be dangerous from a viewpoint of numbers alone.

Mapfarity bellowed, "Jean-Jacques, what are you doing?"

He called back over his shoulder, "I'm taking Lusine with us! She can help us get the Earthman from the Amphibians!"

The Giant lumbered up behind him, threw a rope down to the eager hands of Lusine and pulled her up without effort to the top of the well. A second later, Rastignac leaped upon Mapfarity's back, dug his hands under the upper fringe of the huge Skin and, ignoring its electrical blasts, ripped downwards.

Mapfarity cried out with shock and surprise as his skin flopped on the stones like a devilfish on dry land.

Archambaud ran up then and, without bothering to explain, the Ssassaror and the Man seized him and peeled off *his* artificial hide.

"Now we're all free men!" panted Rastignac. "And the

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mucketeers have no way of locating us if we hide, nor can they punish us with shocks."

He put the Giant on his right side, Lusine on his left, and the egg-stealer behind him. He removed the Jail-breaker's rapier from his sheath. The official was too astonished to protest.

"Law, m'zawfa!" cried Rastignac, parodying in his grotesque French the old Gallic war cry of *"Allons, mes enfants!"*

The King's official came to life and screamed orders at the group of mucketeers who had poured into the courtyard. They halted in confusion. They could not hear him above the roar of horns and thunder of drums and the people sticking their heads out of windows and shouting.

Rastignac scooped up with his épée one of the abandoned Skins flopping on the floor and threw it at the foremost guard. It descended upon the man's head, knocking off his hat and wrapping itself around the head and shoulders. The guard dropped his sword and staggered backwards into the group. At the same time the escapees charged and bowled over their feeble opposition.

It was here that Rastignac drew first blood. The tip of his épée drove past a bewildered mucketeer's blade and entered the fellow's throat just below the chin. It did not penetrate very far because of the dullness of the point. Nevertheless, when Rastignac withdrew his sword he saw blood spurt.

It was the first flower of violence, this scarlet blossom set against the whiteness of a Man's skin.

It would, if he had worn his Skin, have sickened him. Now, he exulted with a shout of triumph.

Lusine swooped up from behind him, bent over the fallen man. Her fingers dipped into the blood and went to her mouth. Greedily, she sucked her fingers.

Rastignac struck her cheek hard with the flat of his hand. She staggered back, her eyes narrow, but she laughed.

The next moments were busy as they entered the castle, knocked down two mucketeers who tried to prevent their passage to the Duke's rooms, then filed across the long suite.

The Duke rose from his writing-desk to greet them. Rastignac, determined to sever all ties and impress the government with the fact that he meant a real violence, snarled at his benefactor, *"Va t'feh fout!"*

The Duke was disconcerted at this harsh command, so obviously impossible to carry out. He blinked and said nothing. The escapees hurried past him to the door that gave exit to the outside. They pushed it open and stepped out into the car that waited for them. A chauffeur leaned against its thin wooden body.

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Mapfarity pushed him aside and climbed in. The others followed. Rastignac was the last to get in. He examined in a glance the vehicle they were supposed to make their flight in.

It was as good a car as you could find in the realm. A Renault of the large class, it had a long boat-shaped scarlet body. There wasn't a scratch on it. It had seats for six. And that it had the power to outrun most anything was indicated by the two extra pairs of legs sticking out from the bottom. There were twelve pairs of legs, equine in form and shod with the best steel. It was the kind of vehicle you wanted when you might have to take off across the country. Wheeled cars could go faster on the highway, but this Renault would not be daunted by water, plowed fields, or steep hillsides.

Rastignac climbed into the driver's seat, seized the wheel and pressed his foot down on the accelerator. The nerve-spot beneath the pedal sent a message to the muscles hidden beneath the hood and the legs projecting from the body. The Renault lurched forward, steadied, and began to pick up speed. It entered a broad paved highway. Hooves drummed; sparks shot out from the steel shoes.

Rastignac guided the brainless, blind creature concealed within the body. He was helped by the somatically-generated radar it employed to steer it past obstacles. When he came to the *Rue des Nues,* he slowed it down to a trot. There was no use tiring it out. Halfway up the gentle slope of the boulevard, however, a Ford galloped out from a side-street. Its seats bristled with tall peaked hats with outspread glowworm wings and with drawn épées.

Rastignac shoved the accelerator to the floor. The Renault broke into a gallop. The Ford turned so that it would present its broad side. As there was a fencework of tall shrubbery growing along the boulevard, the Ford was thus able to block most of the passage.

But, just before his vehicle reached the Ford, Rastignac pressed the Jump button. Few cars had this; only sportsmen or the royalty could afford to have such a neural circuit installed. And it did not allow for gradations in leaping. It was an all-or-none reaction; the legs spurned the ground in perfect unison and with every bit of the power in them. There was no holding back.

The nose lifted, the Renault soared into the air. There was a shout, a slight swaying as the trailing hooves struck the heads of mucketeers who had been stupid enough not to duck, and the vehicle landed with a screeching lurch, upright, on the other side of the Ford. Nor did it pause.

Half an hour later Rastignac reined in the car under a large

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tree whose shadow protected them. "We're well out in the country," he said.

"What do we do now?" asked impatient Archambaud.

"First we must know more about this Earthman," Rastignac answered. "Then we can decide."

VII

Dawn broke through night's guard and spilled a crimson swath on the hills to the East, and the Six Flying Stars faded from sight like a necklace of glowing jewels dipped into an ink bottle.

Rastignac halted the weary Renault on the top of a hill, looked down over the landscape spread out for miles below him. Mapfarity's castle—a tall rose-colored tower of flying buttresses—flashed in the rising sun. It stood on another hill by the sea shore. The country around was a madman's dream of color. Yet to Rastignac every hue sickened the eye. That bright green, for instance, was poisonous; that flaming scarlet was bloody; that pale yellow, rheumy; that velvet black, funeral; that pure white, maggotty.

"Rastignac!" It was Mapfarity's bass, strumming irritation deep in his chest.

"What?"

"What do we do now?"

Jean-Jacques was silent. Archambaud spoke plaintively.

"I'm not used to going without my Skin. There are things I miss. For one thing, I don't know what you're thinking, Jean-Jacques. I don't know whether you're angry at me or love me or are indifferent to me. I don't know where other people *are*. I don't feel the joy of the little animals playing, the freedom of the flight of birds, the ghostly plucking of the growing grass, the sweet stab of the mating lust of the wild-horned apigator, the humming of bees working to build a hive, and the sleepy stupid arrogance of the giant cabbage-eating *deuxnez*. I can feel nothing without the Skin I have worn so long. I feel alone."

Rastignac replied, "You are not alone. I am with you."

Lusine spoke in a low voice, her large brown eyes upon his.

"I, too, feel alone. My Skin is gone, the Skin by which I knew how to act according to the wisdom of my father, the Amphib King. Now that it is gone and I cannot hear his voice through the vibrating tympanum, I do not know what to do."

"At present," replied Rastignac, "you will do as I tell you."

Mapfarity repeated, "What now?"

Rastignac became brisk. He said, "We go to your castle, Giant. We use your smithy to put sharp points on our swords, points to slide through a man's body from front to back. Don't pale! That is what we must do. And then we pick up your goose that lays the golden eggs, for we must have

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money if we are to act efficiently. After that, we buy—or steal—a boat and we go to wherever the Earthman is held captive. And we rescue him."

"And then?" said Lusine, her eyes shining with emotion.

"What you do then will be up to you. But I am going to leave this planet and voyage with the Earthman to other worlds."

Silence. Then Mapfarity said, "Why leave here?"

"Because there is no hope for this land. Nobody will give up his Skin. *Le Beau Pays* is doomed to a lotus-life. And that is not for me."

Archambaud jerked a thumb at the Amphib girl. "What about her people?"

"They may win, the water-people. What's the difference? It will be just the exchange of one Skin for another. Before I heard of the landing of the Earthman I was going to fight no matter what the cost to me or inevitable defeat. But not now."

Mapfarity's rumble was angry. "Ah, Jean-Jacques, this is not my comrade talking. Are you sure you haven't swallowed your Skin? You talk as if you were inside-out. What is the matter with your brain? Can't you see that it will indeed make a difference if the Amphibs get the upper hand? Can't you see *who* is making the Amphibs behave the way they have been?"

Rastignac urged the Renault towards the rose-colored lacy castle high upon a hill. The vehicle trotted tiredly along the rough and narrow forest path.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"I mean the Amphibs got along fine with the Ssassaror until a new element entered their lives—the Earthmen. Then the antagonising began. What is this new element? It's the Changelings—the mixture of Earthmen and Amphibs or Ssassaror and Terran. Add it up. Turn it around. Look at it from any angle. It is the Changelings who are behind this restlessness—the Human element.

"Another thing. The Amphibs have always had Skins different from ours. Our factories create our Skins to set up an affinity and communication between their wearers and all of Nature. They are designed to make it easier for every Man to love his neighbor.

"Now, the strange thing about the Amphibs' Skin is that they, too, were once designed to do such things. But in the past thirty or forty years new Skins have been created for one primary purpose—to establish a communication between the Sea-King and his subjects. Not only that, the Skins can be operated at long distances so that the King may punish any disobedient subject. And they are set so that they establish affinity only among the Waterfolk, not between them and all of Nature."

"I had gathered some of that

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during my conversations with Lusine," said Rastignac. "But I did not know it had gone to such lengths."

"Yes, and you may safely bet that the Changelings are behind it."

"Then it is the human element that is corrupting?"

"What else?"

Rastignac said, "Lusine, what do you say to this?"

"I think it is best that you leave this world. Or else turn Changeling-Amphib."

"Why should I join you Amphibians?"

"A man like you could become a Sea-King."

"And drink blood?"

"I would rather drink blood than mate with a Man. Almost, that is. But I would make an exception with you, Jean-Jacques."

If it had been a Land-woman who made such a blunt proposal he would have listened with equanimity. There was no modesty, false or otherwise, in the country of the Skin-wearers. But to hear such a thing from a woman whose mouth had drunk the blood of a living man filled him with disgust.

Yet, he had to admit Lusine was beautiful. If she had not been a blood-drinker . . .

Though he lacked his receptive Skin, Mapfarity seemed to sense Rastignac's emotions. He said, "You must not blame her too much, Jean-Jacques. Sea-changelings are conditioned from babyhood to love blood. And for a very definite purpose, too, unnatural though it is. When the time comes for hordes of Changelings to sweep out of the sea and overwhelm the Landfolk, they will have no compunctions about cutting the throats of their fellow-creatures."

Lusine laughed. The rest of them shifted uneasily but did not comment. Rastignac changed the subject.

"How did you find out about the Earthman, Mapfarity?" he said.

The Ssassaror smiled. Two long yellow canines shone wetly; the nose, which had nostrils set in the sides, gaped open; blue sparks shot out from it; at the same time the feathered tufts on the ends of the elephantine ears stiffened and crackled with red-and-blue sparks.

"I have been doing something besides breeding geese to lay golden eggs," he said. "I have set traps for Waterfolk, and I have caught two. These I caged in a dungeon in my castle, and I experimented with them. I removed their Skins and put them on me, and I found out many interesting facts."

He leered at Lusine, who was no longer laughing, and he said, "For instance, I discovered that the Sea-King can locate, talk to, and punish any of his subjects anywhere in the sea or along the coast. He has booster Skins

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planted all over his realm so that any message he sends will reach the receiver, no matter how far away he is. Moreover, he has conditioned each and every Skin so that, by uttering a certain codeword to which only one particular Skin will respond, he may stimulate it to shock or even to kill its carrier."

Mapfarity continued, "I analyzed those two Skins in my lab and then, using them as models, made a number of duplicates in my fleshforge. They lacked only the nerves that would enable the Sea-King to shock us."

Rastignac smiled his appreciation of this coup. Mapfarity's ears crackled blue sparks of joy, his equivalent of blushing.

"Ah, then you have doubtless listened in to many broadcasts. And you know where the Earthman is located?"

"Yes," said the Giant. "He is in the palace of the Amphib King, upon the island of Kataproimnoin. That is only thirty miles out to the sea."

Rastignac did not know what he would do, but he had two advantages in the Amphibs' Skins and in Lusine. And he burned to get off this doomed planet, this land of men too sunk in false happiness, sloth, and stupidity to see that soon death would come from the water.

He had two possible avenues of escape. One was to use the newly arrived Earthman's knowledge so that the fuels necessary to propel the ferry-rockets could be manufactured. The rockets themselves still stood in a museum. Rastignac had not planned to use them because neither he nor any one else on this planet knew how to make fuel for them. Such secrets had long ago been forgotten.

But now that science was available through the newcomer from Earth, the rockets could be equipped and taken up to one of the Six Flying Stars. The Earthman could study the rocket, determine what was needed in the way of supplies, then it could be outfitted for the long voyage.

An alternative was the Terran's vessel. Perhaps he might invite him to come along in it . . .

The huge gateway to Mapfarity's castle interrupted his thoughts.

VIII

He halted the Renault, told Archambaud to find the Giant's servant and have him feed their vehicle, rub its legs down with liniment, and examine the hooves for defective shoes.

Archambaud was glad to look up Mapfabvisheen, the Giant's servant, because he had not seen him for a long time. The little Ssassaror had been an active member of the Egg-stealer's Guild until the night three years ago when he had tried to creep into Mapfarity's strongroom. The crafty guildsman had avoided the Giant's traps and

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there found the two geese squatting upon their bed of minerals.

These fabulous geese made no sound when he picked them up with lead-lined gloves and put them in his bag, also lined with lead-leaf. They were not even aware of him. Laboratory-bred, retort-shaped, their protoplasm a blend of silicon-carbon, unconscious even that they lived, they munched upon lead and other elements, ruminated, gastated, transmuted, and every month, regular as the clockwork march of stars or whirl of electrons, each laid an octagonal egg of pure gold.

Mapfabvisheen had trodden softly from the strongroom and thought himself safe. And then, amazingly, frighteningly, and totally unethically, from his viewpoint, the geese had begun honking loudly!

He had run, but not fast enough. The Giant had come stumbling from his bed in response to the wild clamor and had caught him. And, according to the contract drawn up between the Guild of Egg-stealers and the League of Giants, a guildsman seized within the precints of a castle must serve the goose's owner for two years. Mapfabvisheen had been greedy; he had tried to take both geese. Therefore, he must wait upon the Giant for a double term.

Afterwards, he found out how he'd been trapped. The egg-layers themselves hadn't been honking. Mouthless, they were utterly incapable of that. Mapfarity had fastened a so-called "goose-tracker" to the strongroom's doorway. This device clicked loudly whenever a goose was nearby. It could smell out one even through a lead-leaf-lined bag. When Mapfabvisheen passed underneath it, its clicks woke up a small Skin beside it. The Skin, mostly lung-sac and voice organs, honked its warning. And the dwarf, Mapfabvisheen, began his servitude to the Giant, Mapfarity.

Rastignac knew the story. He also knew that Mapfarity had infected the fellow with the philosophy of Violence and that he was now a good member of his Underground. He was eager to tell him his servitor days were over, that he could now take his place in their band as an equal. Subject, of course, to Rastignac's order.

Mapfabvisheen was stretched out upon the floor and snoring a sour breath. A grey-haired man was slumped on a nearby table. His head, turned to one side, exhibited the same slack-jawed look that the Ssassaror's had, and he flung the ill-smelling gauntlet of his breath at the visitors. He held an empty bottle in one loose hand. Two other bottles lay on the stone floor, one shattered.

Besides the bottles lay the men's Skins. Rastignac wondered why

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they had not crawled to the hall-tree and hung themselves up.

"What ails them? What is that smell?" said Mapfarity.

"I don't know," replied Archambaud, "but I know the visitor. He is Father Jules, priest of the Guild of Egg-stealers."

Rastignac raised his queer, bracket-shaped eyebrows, picked up a bottle in which there remained a slight residue, and drank.

"Mon Dieu, it is the sacrament wine!" he cried.

Mapfarity said, "Why would they be drinking that?"

"I don't know. Wake Mapfabvisheen up, but let the good father sleep. He seems tired after his spiritual labors and doubtless deserves a rest."

Doused with a bucket of cold water the little Ssassaror staggered to his feet. Seeing Archambaud, he embraced him. "Ah, Archambaud, old baby-abductor, my sweet goose-bagger, my ears tingle to see you again!"

They did. Red and blue sparks flew off his ear-feathers.

"What is the meaning of this?" sternly interrupted Mapfarity. He pointed at the dirt swept into the corners.

Mapfabvisheen drew himself up to his full dignity, which wasn't much. "Good Father Jules was making his circuits," he said. "You know he travels around the country and hears confession and sings Mass for us poor egg-stealers who have been unlucky enough to fall into the clutches of some rich and greedy and anti-social Giant who is too stingy to hire servants, but captures them instead, and who won't allow us to leave the premises until our servitude is over . . ."

"Cut it!" thundered Mapfarity. "I can't stand around all day, listening to the likes of you. My feet hurt too much. Anyway, you know I've allowed you to go into town every week-end. Why don't you see a priest then?"

Mapfabvisheen said, "You know very well the closest town is ten kilometers away and it's full of Pantheists. There's not a priest to be found there."

Rastignac groaned inwardly. Always it was thus. You could never hurry these people or get them to regard anything seriously.

Take the case they were wasting their breath on now. Everybody knew the Church had been outlawed a long time ago because it opposed the use of the Skins and certain other practices that went along with it. So, no sooner had that been done than the Ssassarors, anxious to establish their check-and-balance system, had made arrangements through the Minister of Ill-Will to give the Church unofficial legal recognizance.

Then, though the aborigines had belonged to that pantheistical organization known as the Sons of Good And Old Mother Nature,

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they had all joined the Church of the Terrans. They operated under the theory that the best way to make an institution innocuous was for everybody to sign up for it. Never persecute. That makes it thrive.

Much to the Church's chagrin, the theory worked. How can you fight an enemy who insists on joining you and who will also agree to everything you teach him and then still worship at the other service? Supposedly driven underground, the Church counted almost every Landsman among its supporters from the Kings down.

Every now and then a priest would forget to wear his Skin out-of-doors and be arrested, then released later in an official jailbreak. Those who refused to cooperate were forcibly kidnapped, taken to another town and there let loose. Nor did it do the priest any good to proclaim boldly who he was. Everybody pretended not to know he was a fugitive from justice. They insisted on calling him by his official pseudonym.

However, few priests were such martyrs. Generations of Skin-wearing had sapped the ecclesiastical vigor.

The thing that puzzled Rastignac about Father Jules was the sacrament wine. Neither he nor anybody else in L'Bawpfey, as far as he knew, had ever tasted the liquid outside of the ceremony. Indeed, except for certain of the priests, nobody even knew how to make wine.

He shook the priest awake, said, "What's the matter, Father?"

Father Jules burst into tears. "Ah, my boy, you have caught me in my sin. I am a drunkard."

Everybody looked blank. "What does that word *drunkard* mean?"

"It means a man who's damned enough to fill his Skin with alcohol, my boy, fill it until he's no longer a man but a beast."

"Alcohol? What is that?"

"The stuff that's in the wine, my boy. You don't know what I'm talking about because the knowledge was long ago forbidden except to us of the cloth. Cloth, he says! Bah! We go around like everybody, naked except for these extradermal monstrosities which reveal rather than conceal, which not only serve us as clothing but as mentors, parents, censors, interpreters, and, yes, even as priests. Where's a bottle that's not empty? I'm thirsty."

Rastignac stuck to the subject. "Why was the making of this alcohol forbidden?"

"How should I know?" said Father Jules. "I'm old, but not so ancient that I came with the Six Flying Stars . . . Where is that bottle?"

Rastignac was not offended by his crossness. Priests were notorious for being the most ill-tempered, obstreperous, and unstable of men. They were not at

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all like the clerics of Earth, whom everybody knew from legend had been sweet-tempered, meek, humble, and obedient to authority. But on L'Bawpfey these men of the Church had reason to be out of sorts. Everybody attended Mass, paid their tithes, went to confession, and did not fall asleep during sermons. Everybody believed what the priests told them and were as good as it was possible for human beings to be. So, the priests had no real incentive to work, no evil to fight.

Then why the prohibition against alcohol?

"Sacre Bleu!" groaned Father Jules. "Drink as much as I did last night and you'll find out. Never again, I say. Ah, there's another bottle, hidden by a providential fate under my traveling robe. Where's that corkscrew?"

Father Jules swallowed half of the bottle, smacked his lips, picked up his Skin from the floor, brushed off the dirt and said, "I must be going, my sons. I've a noon appointment with the bishop, and I've a good twelve kilometers to travel. Perhaps one of you gentlemen has a car?"

Rastignac shook his head and said he was sorry but their car was tired and had, besides, thrown a shoe. Father Jules shrugged philosophically, put on his Skin and reached out again for the bottle.

Rastignac said, "Sorry, Father. I'm keeping this bottle."

"For what?" asked father Jules.

"Never mind. Say I'm keeping you from temptation."

"Bless you, my son, and may you have a big enough hangover to show you the wickedness of your ways."

Smiling, Rastignac watched the Father walk out. He was not disappointed. The priest had no sooner reached the huge door than his Skin fell off and lay motionless upon the stone.

"Ah," breather Rastignac. "The same thing happened to Mapfabvisheen when he put his on. There must be something about the wine that deadens the Skins, makes them fall off."

After the padre had left, Rastignac handed the bottle to Mapfarity. "We're dedicated to breaking the law most illegally, brother. So I'm asking you to analyze this wine and find out how to make it."

"Why not ask Father Jules?"

"Because priests are pledged never to reveal the secret. That was one of the original agreements whereby the Church was allowed to remain on L'Bawpfey. Or, at least that's what my parish priest told me. He said it was a good thing, as it removed an evil from man's temptation. He never did say why it was so evil. Maybe he didn't know.

"That doesn't matter. What does matter is that the Church has inadvertently given us a weapon whereby we may free Man from his bondage to the Skins and it

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has also given itself once again a chance to be really persecuted and to flourish on the blood of its martyrs."

"Blood?" said Lusine, licking her lips. "The Churchmen drink blood?"

Rastignac did not explain. He could be wrong. If so, he'd feel less like a fool if they didn't know what he thought.

Meanwhile, there were the first steps to be taken for the unskinning of an entire planet.

IX

Later that day the mucketeers surrounded the castle but they made no effort to storm it. The following day one of them knocked on the huge front door and presented Mapfarity with a summons requiring them to surrender. The Giant laughed, put the document in his mouth and ate it. The server fainted and had to be revived with a bucket of cold water before he could stagger back to report this tradition-shattering reception.

Rastignac set up his underground so it could be expanded in a hurry. He didn't worry about the blockade because, as was well known, Giants' castles had all sorts of subterranean tunnels and secret exits. He contacted a small number of priests who were willing to work for him. These were congenital rebels who became quite enthusiastic when he told them their activities would result in a fierce persecution of the Church.

The majority, however, clung to their Skins and said they would have nothing to do with this extradermal-less devil. They took pride and comfort in that term. The vulgar phrase for the man who refused to wear his Skin was "devil," and, by law and logic, the Church could not be associated with a devil. As everybody knew, the priests have always been on the side of the angels.

Meanwhile, the Devil's band slipped out of the tunnels and made raids. Their targets were Giants' castles and government treasuries; their loot, the geese. So many raids did they make that the president of the League of Giants and the Business Agent for the Guild of Egg-stealers came to plead with them. And remained to denounce. Rastignac was delighted with their complaints, and, after listening for a while, threw them out.

Rastignac had, like all other Skin-wearers, always accepted the monetary system as a thing of reason and steady balance. But, without his Skin he was able to think objectively and saw its weaknesses.

For some cause buried far in history, the Giants had always had control of the means for making the hexagonal golden coins called *oeufs*. But the Kings, wishing to get control of the golden eggs, had set up that élite branch of the

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Guild which specialized in abducting the half-living 'geese.' Whenever a thief was successful he turned the goose over to his King. The monarch, in turn, sent a note to the robbed Giant informing him that the government intended to keep the goose to make its own currency. But even though the Giant was making counterfeit geese, the King, in his generosity, would ship to the Giant one out of every thirty eggs laid by the kidnappee.

The note was a polite and well-recognized lie. The Giants made the only genuine gold-egg-laying geese on the planet because the Giants' League alone knew the secret. And the King gave back one-thirtieth of his loot so the Giant could accumulate enough money to buy the materials to create another goose. Which would, possibly, be stolen later on.

Rastignac, by his illegal rape of geese, was making money scarce. Peasants were hanging on to their produce and waiting to sell until prices were at their highest. The government, merchants, the league, the guild, all saw themserves impoverished.

Furthermore, the Amphibs, taking note of the situation, were making raids of their own and blaming them on Rastignac.

He did not care. He was intent on trying to find a way to reach Kataproimnoin and rescue the Earthman so he could take off in the spaceship floating in the harbor. But he knew that he would have to take things slowly, to scout out the land and plan accordingly.

Furthermore, Mapfarity had made him promise he would do his best to set up the Landsmen so they would be able to resist the Waterfolk when the day for war came.

Rastignac made his biggest raid when he and his band stole one moonless night into the capital itself to rob the big Goose House, only an egg's throw away from the Palace and the Ministry of Ill-Will. They put the Goose House guards to sleep with little arrows smeared with dream-snake venom, filled their lead-leaf-lined bags with gold eggs, and sneaked out the back door.

As they left, Rastignac saw a cloaked figure slinking from the back door of the Ministry. Seized with intuition, he tackled the figure. It was an Amphib-changeling. Rastignac struck the Amphib with a venomous arrow before the Water-human could cry out or stab back.

Mapfarity grabbed up the limp Amphib and they raced for the safety of the castle.

They questioned the Amphib, Pierre Pusipremnoos, in the castle. At first silent, he later began talking freely when Mapfarity got a heavy Skin from his flesh-forge and put it on the fellow. It was a Skin modeled after those worn by

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the Water-people, but it differed in that the Giant could control, through another Skin, the powerful neural shocks.

After a few shocks Pierre admitted he was the foster-son of the Amphibian King and that, incidentally, Lusine was his foster-sister. He further stated he was a messenger between the Amphib King and the Ssarraror's Ill-Will Minister.

More shocks extracted the fact that the Minister of Ill-Will, Auverpin, was an Amphib-changeling who was passing himself off as a born Landsman. Not only that, the Human hostages among the Amphibs were about to stage a carefully planned revolt against the born Amphibs. It would kill off about half of them. The rest would then be brought under control of the Master Skin.

When the two stepped from the lab they were attacked by Lusine, knife in hand. She gashed Rastignac in the arm before he knocked her out with an uppercut. Later, while Mapfarity applied a little jelly-like creature called a *scar-jester* to the wound, Rastignac complained:

"I don't know if I can endure much more of this. I thought the way of Violence would not be hard to follow because I hated the Skins and the Amphibs so much. But it is easier to attack a faceless, hypothetical enemy, or torture him, than the individual enemy. Much easier."

"My brother," boomed the Giant, "if you continue to dwell upon the philosophical implications of your actions you will end up as helpless and confused as the leg-counting centipede. Better not think. Warriors are not supposed to. They lose their keen fighting edge when they think. And you need all of that now."

"I would suppose that thought would sharpen them."

"When issues are simple, yes. But you must remember that the system on this planet is anything but uncomplicated. It was set up to confuse, to keep one always off balance. Just try to keep one thing in mind—the Skins are far more of an impediment to Man than they are a help. Also, that if the Skins don't come off the Amphibs will soon be cutting our throats. The only way to save ourselves is to kill them first. Right?"

"I suppose so," said Rastignac. He stooped and put his hands under the unconscious Lusine's armpits. "Help me put her in a room. We'll keep her locked up until she cools off. Then we'll use her to guide us when we get to Kataproimnoin. Which reminds me—how many gallons of the wine have you made so far?"

X

A week later Rastignac summoned Lusine. She came in frowning, and with her lower lip protruding in a pretty pout.

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He said, "Day after tomorrow is the day on which the new Kings are crowned, isn't it?"

Tonelessly she said, "Supposedly. Actually, the present Kings will be crowned again."

Rastignac smiled. "I know. Peculiar, isn't it, how the 'people' always vote the same Kings back into power? However, that isn't what I'm getting at. If I remember correctly, the Amphibs give their King exotic and amusing gifts on coronation day. What do you think would happen if I took a big shipload of bottles of wine and passed it out among the population just before the Amphibs begin their surprise massacre?"

Lusine had seen Mapfarity and Rastignac experimenting with the wine and she had been frightened by the results. Nevertheless, she made a brave attempt to hide her fear now. She spit at him and said, "You mud-footed fool! There are priests who will know what it is! They will be in the coronation crowd."

"Ah, not so! In the first place, you Amphibs are almost entirely Aggressive Pantheists. You have only a few priests, and you will now pay for that omission of wine-tasters. Second, Mapfarity's concoction tastes not at all vinous and is twice as strong."

She spat at him again and spun on her heel and walked out.

That night Rastignac's band and Lusine went through a tunnel which brought them up through a hollow tree about two miles west of the castle. There they hopped into the Renault, which had been kept in a camouflaged garage, and drove to the little port of Marrec. Archambaud had paved their way here with golden eggs and a sloop was waiting for them.

Rastignac took the boat's wheel. Lusine stood beside him, ready to answer the challenge of any Amphib patrol that tried to stop them. As the Amphib-King's foster-daughter, she could get the boat through to the Amphib island without any trouble at all.

Archambaud stood behind her, a knife under his cloak, to make sure she did not try to betray them. Lusine had sworn she could be trusted. Rastignac had answered that he was sure she could be, too, as long as the knife point pricked her back to remind her.

Nobody stopped them. An hour before dawn they anchored in the harbor of Kataproimnoin. Lusine was tied hand and foot inside the cabin. Before Rastignac could scratch her with dream-snake venom, she pleaded, "You could not do this to me, Jean-Jacques, if you loved me."

"Who said anything about loving you?"

"Well, I like that! You said so, you cheat!"

"Oh, *then!* Well, Lusine, you've had enough experience to know that such protestations of tenderness and affection are only in-

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evitable accompaniments of the moment's passion."

For the first time since he had known her he saw Lusine's lower lip tremble and tears come in her eyes. "Do you mean you were only using me?" she sobbed.

"You forget I had good reason to think you were just using *me*. Remember, you're an Amphib, Lusine. Your people can't be trusted. You blood-drinkers are as savage as the little sea-monsters you leave in Human cradles."

"Jean-Jacques, take me with you! I'll do anything you say! I'll even cut my foster-father's throat for you!"

He laughed. Unheeding, she swept on. "I want to be with you, Jean-Jacques! Look, with me to guide you in, my homeland—with my prestige as the Amphib-King's daughter—you can become King yourself after the rebellion. I'd get rid of the Amphib-King for you so there'll be nobody in your way!"

She felt no more guilt than a tigress. She was naive and terrible, innocent and disgusting.

"No, thanks, Lusine." He scratched her with the dream-snake needle. As her eyes closed he said, "You don't understand. All I want to do is voyage to the stars. Being King means nothing to me. The only person I'd trade places with would be the Earthman the Amphibs hold prisoner."

He left her sleeping in the locked cabin.

Noon found them loafing on the great square in front of the Palace of the Two Kings of the Sea and the Islands. All were disguised as Waterfolk. Before they'd left the castle, they had grafted webs between their fingers and toes—just as Amphib-changelings who weren't born with them, did—and they wore the special Amphib Skins that Mapfarity had grown in his flesh-forge. These were able to tune in on the Amphibs' wavelengths, but they lacked their shock mechanism.

Rastignac had to locate the Earthman, rescue him, and get him to the spaceship that lay anchored between two wharfs, its sharp nose pointing outwards. A wooden bridge had been built from one of the wharfs to a place halfway up its towering side.

Rastignac could not make out any breaks in the smooth metal that would indicate a port, but reason told him there must be some sort of entrance to the ship at that point.

A guard of twenty Amphibs repulsed any attempt on the crowd's part to get on the bridge.

Rastignac had contacted the harbor-master and made arrangements for workmen to unload his cargo of wine. His freehandedness with the gold eggs got him immediate service even on this general holiday. Once in the square, he and his men uncrated the wine but left the two heavy

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chests on the wagon which was hitched to a powerful little six-legged Jeep.

They stacked the bottles of wine in a huge pile while the curious crowd in the square encircled them to watch. Rastignac then stood on a chest to survey the scene, so that he could best judge the time to start. There were perhaps seven or eight thousand of all three races there—the Ssassarors, the Amphibs, the Humans—with an unequal portioning of each.

Rastignac, looking for just such a thing, noticed that every non-human Amphib had at least two Humans tagging at his heels.

It would take two Humans to handle an Amphib or a Ssassaror. The Amphibs stood upon their seal-like hind flippers at least six and a half feet tall and weighed about three hundred pounds. The Giant Ssassarors, being fisheaters, had reached the same enormous height as Mapfarity. The Giants were in the minority, as the Amphibs had always preferred stealing Human babies from the Terrans. These were marked for death as much as the Amphibs.

Rastignac watched for signs of uneasiness or hostility between the three groups. Soon he saw the signs. They were not plentiful, but they were enough to indicate an uneasy undercurrent. Three times the guards had to intervene to break up quarrels. The Humans eyed the non-human quarrelers, but made no move to help their Amphib fellows against the Giants. Not only that, they took them aside afterwards and seemed to be reprimanding them. Evidently the order was that everyone was to be on his behavior until the time to revolt.

Rastignac glanced at the great tower-clock. "It's an hour before the ceremonies begin," he said to his men. "Let's go."

XI

Mapfarity, who had been loitering in the crowd some distance away, caught Archambaud's signal and slowly, as befit a Giant whose feet hurt, limped towards them. He stopped, scrutinized the pile of bottles, then, in his lion's-roar-at-the-bottom-of-a-well voice said, "Say, what's in these bottles?"

Rastignac shouted back, "A drink which the new Kings will enjoy very much."

"What's that?" replied Mapfarity. "Sea-water?"

The crowd laughed.

"No, it's not water," Rastignac said, "as anybody but a lumbering Giant should know. It is a delicious drink that brings a rare ecstacy upon the drinker. I got the formula for it from an old witch who lives on the shores of far off Apfelabvidanahyew. He told me it had been in his family since the coming of Man to L'Bawpfey. He parted with the formula on condition I make it only for the Kings."

"Will only Their Majesties get

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to taste this exquisite drink?" bellowed Mapfarity.

"That depends upon whether it pleases Their Majesties to give some to their subjects to celebrate the result of the elections."

Archambaud, also planted in the crowd, shrilled, "I suppose if they do, the big-paunched Amphibs and Giants will get twice as much as us Humans. They always do, it seems."

There was a mutter from the crowd; approbation from the Amphibs, protest from the others.

"That will make no difference," said Rastignac, smiling. "The fascinating thing about this is that an Amphib can drink no more than a Human. That may be why the old man who revealed his secret to me called the drink Old Equalizer."

"Ah, you're skinless," scoffed Mapfarity, throwing the most deadly insult known. "I can outdrink, out-eat, and out-swim any Human here. Here, Amphib, give me a bottle, and we'll see if I'm bragging."

An Amphib captain pushed himself through the throng, waddling clumsily on his flippers like an upright seal.

"No, you don't!" he barked. "Those bottles are intended for the Kings. No commoner touches them, least of all a Human and a Giant."

Rastignac mentally hugged himself. He couldn't have planned a better intervention himself! "Why can't I?" he replied. "Until I make an official presentation, these bottles are mine, not the Kings'. I'll do what I want with them."

"Yeah," said the Amphibs. "That's telling him!"

The Amphib's big brown eyes narrowed and his animal-like face wrinkled, but he couldn't think of a retort. Rastignac at once handed a bottle apiece to each of his comrades. They uncorked and drank and then assumed an ecstatic expression which was a tribute to their acting, for these three bottles held only fruit juice.

"Look here, captain," said Rastignac, "why don't you try a swig yourself? Go ahead. There's plenty. And I'm sure Their Majesties would be pleased to contribute some of it on this joyous occasion. Besides, I can always make more for the Kings.

"As a matter of fact," he added, winking, "I expect to get a pension from the courts as the Kings' Old Equalizer-maker."

The crowd laughed. The Amphib, afraid of losing face, took the bottle—which contained wine rather than fruit juice. After a few long swallows the Amphib's eyes became red and a silly grin curved his thin, black-edged lips. Finally, in a thickening voice, he asked for another bottle.

Rastignac, in a sudden burst of generosity, not only gave him one, but began passing out bottles to the many eager reaching hands. Mapfarity and the two egg-thieves

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helped him. In a short time, the pile of bottles had dwindled to a fourth of its former height. When a mixed group of guards strode up and demanded to know what the commotion was about, Rastignac gave them some of the bottles.

Meanwhile, Archambaud slipped off into the mob. He lurched into an Amphib, said something nasty about his ancestors, and pulled his knife. When the Amphib lunged for the little man, Archambaud jumped back and shoved a Human-Amphib into the giant flipper-like arms.

Within a minute the square had erupted into a fighting mob. Staggering, red-eyed, slur-tongued, their long-repressed hostility against each other, released by the liquor which their bodies were unaccustomed to, Human, Ssassaror and Amphib fell to with the utmost will, slashing, slugging, fighting with everything they had.

None of them noticed that every one who had drunk from the bottles had lost his Skin. The Skins had fallen off one by one and lay motionless on the pavement where they were kicked or stepped upon. Not one Skin tried to crawl back to its owner because they were all nerve-numbed by the wine.

Rastignac, seated behind the wheel of the Jeep, began driving as best he could through the battling mob. After frequent stops he halted before the broad marble steps that ran like a stairway to heaven, up and up before it ended on the Porpoise Porch of the Palace. He and his gang were about to take the two heavy chests off the wagon when they were transfixed by a scene before them.

A score of dead Humans and Amphibs lay on the steps, evidence of the fierce struggle that had taken place between the guards of the two monarchs. Evidently the King had heard of the riot and hastened outside. There the Amphib-changeling King had apparently realized that the rebellion was way ahead of schedule, but he had attacked the Amphib King anyway.

And he had won, for his guardsmen held the struggling flipper-footed Amphib ruler down while two others bent his head back over a step. The Changeling-King himself, still clad in the coronation robes, was about to draw his long ceremonial knife across the exposed and palpitating throat of the Amphib King.

This in itself was enough to freeze the onlookers. But the sight of Lusine running up the stairway towards the rulers added to their paralysis. She had a knife in her hand and was holding it high as she ran toward her foster-father, the Amphib King.

Mapfarity groaned, but Rastignac said, "It doesn't matter that she has escaped. We'll go ahead with our original plan."

They began unloading the chests while Rastignac kept an

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eye on Lusine. He saw her run up, stop, say a few words to the Amphib King, then kneel and stab him, burying the knife in his jugular vein. Then, before anybody could stop her she had applied her mouth to the cut in his neck.

The Human-King kicked her in the ribs and sent her rolling down the steps. Rastignac saw correctly that it was not her murderous deed that caused his reaction. It was because she had dared to commit it without his permission and had also drunk the royal blood first.

He further noted with grim satisfaction that when Lusine recovered from the blow and ran back up to talk to the King, he ignored her. She pointed at the group around the wagon but he dismissed her with a wave of his hand. He was too busy gloating over his vanquished rival lying at his feet.

The plotters hoisted the two chests and staggered up the steps. The King passed them as he went down with no more than a curious glance. Gifts had been coming up those steps all day for the King, so he undoubtedly thought of them only as more gifts. So Rastignac and his men walked past the knives of the guards as if they had nothing to fear.

Lusine stood alone at the top of the steps. She was in a half-crouch, knife ready. "I'll kill the King and I'll drink from his throat!" she cried hoarsly. "No man kicks me except for love. Has he forgotten that I am the foster-daughter of the Amphib King?"

Rastignac felt revulsion but he had learned by now that those who deal in violence and rebellion must march with strange steppers.

"Bear a hand here," he said, ignoring her threat.

Meekly she grabbed hold of a chest's corner. To his further questioning, she replied that the Earthman who had landed in the ship was held in a suite of rooms in the west wing. Their trip thereafter was fast and direct. Unopposed, they carted the chests to the huge room where the Master Skin was kept.

There they found ten frantic bio-technicians excitedly trying to determine why the great extraderm—the Master Skin through which all individual Skins were controlled—was not broadcasting properly. They had no way as yet of knowing that it was operating perfectly but that the little Skins upon the Amphibs and their hostage Humans were not shocking them into submission because they were lying in a wine-stupor on the ground. No one had told them that the Skins, which fed off the bloodstream of their hosts, had become anesthetized from the alcohol and failed any longer to react to their Master Skin.

That, of course, applied only

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to those Skins in the square that were drunk from the wine. Elsewhere all over the kingdom, Amphibs writhed in agony and Ssassarors and Terrans were taking advantage of their helplessness to cut their throats. But not here, where the crux of the matter was.

XII

The Landsmen rushed the techs and pushed them into the great chemical vat in which the twenty-five hundred foot square Master Skin floated. Then they uncrated the lead-leaf-lined bags filled with stolen geese and emptied them into the nutrient fluid. According to Mapfarity's calculations, the radio-activity from the silicon-carbon geese should kill the big Skin within a few days. When a new one was grown, that, too, would die. Unless the Amphib guessed what was wrong and located the geese on the bottom of the ten-foot deep tank, they would not be able to stop the process. That did not seem likely.

In either case, it was necessary that the Master Skin be put out of temporary commission, at least, so the Amphibs over the Kingdom could have a fighting chance. Mapfarity plunged a hollow harpoon into the isle of floating protoplasm and through a tube connected to that poured into the Skin three gallons of the dream-snake venom. That was enough to knock it out for an hour or two. Meanwhile, if the Amphibs had any sense at all, they'd have rid themselves of their extraderms.

They left the lab and entered the west wing. As they trotted up the long winding corridors Lusine said, "Jean-Jacques, what do you plan on doing now? Will you try to make yourself King of the Terrans and fight us Amphibs?" When he said nothing she went on. "Why don't you kill the Amphib-changeling King and take over here? I could help you do that. You could then have all of L'Bawpfey in your power."

He shot her a look of contempt and cried, "Lusine, can't you get it through that thick little head of yours that everything I've done has been done so that I can win one goal: reach the Flying Stars? If I can get the Earthman to his ship I'll leave with him and not set foot again for years on this planet. Maybe never again."

She looked stricken. "But what about the war here?" she asked.

"There are a few men among the Landfolk who are capable of leading in wartime. It will take strong men, and there are very few like me, I admit, but—oh, oh, opposition!" He broke off at sight of the six guards who stood before the Earthman's suite.

Lusine helped, and within a minute they had slain three and chased away the others. Then they burst through the door—and Rastignac received another shock.

The occupant of the apartment was a tiny and exquisitely formed

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redhead with large blue eyes and very unmasculine curves!

"I thought you said Earth*man?*" protested Rastignac to the Giant who came lumbering along behind them.

"Oh, I used that in the generic sense," Mapfarity replied. "You didn't expect me to pay any attention to sex, did you? I'm not interested in the gender of you Humans, you know."

There was no time for reproach. Rastignac tried to explain to the Earthwoman who he was, but she did not understand him. However, she did seem to catch on to what he wanted and seemed reassured by his gestures. She picked up a large book from a table and, hugging it to her small, high and rounded bosom, went with him out the door.

They raced from the palace and descended onto the square. Here they found the surviving Amphibs clustered into a solid phalanx and fighting, bloody step by step, towards the street that led to the harbor.

Rastignac's little group skirted the battle and started down the steep avenue toward the harbor. Halfway down he glanced back and saw that nobody as yet was paying any attention to them. Nor was there anybody on the street to bother them, though the pavement was strewn with Skins and bodies. Apparently, those who'd lived through the first savage mêlée had gone to the square.

They ran onto the wharf. The Earthwoman motioned to Rastignac that she knew how to open the spaceship, but the Amphibs didn't. Moreover, if they did get in, they wouldn't know how to operate it. She had the directions for so doing in the book hugged so desperately to her chest. Rastignac surmised she hadn't told the Amphibs about that. Apparently they hadn't, as yet, tried to torture the information from her.

Therefore, her telling him about the book indicated she trusted him.

Lusine said, "Now what, Jean-Jacques? Are you still going to abandon this planet?"

"Of course," he snapped.

"Will you take me with you?"

He had spent most of his life under the tutelage of his Skin, which ensured that others would know when he was lying. It did not come easy to hide his true feelings. So a habit of a lifetime won out.

"I will not take you," he said. "In the first place, though you may have some admirable virtues, I've failed to detect one. In the second place, I could not stand your blood-drinking nor your murderous and totally immoral ways."

"But, Jean-Jacques, I will give them up for you!"

"Can the shark stop eating fish?"

"You would leave Lusine, who loves you as no Earthwoman

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could, and go with that—that pale little doll I could break with my hands?"

"Be quiet," he said. "I have dreamed of this moment all my life. Nothing can stop me now."

They were on the wharf beside the bridge that ran up the smooth side of the starship. The guard was no longer there, though bodies showed that there had been reluctance on the part of some to leave.

They let the Earthwoman precede them up the bridge.

Lusine suddenly ran ahead of him, crying, "If you won't have me, you won't have her, either! Nor the stars!"

Her knife sank twice into the Earthwoman's back. Then, before anybody could reach her, she had leaped off the bridge and into the harbor.

Rastignac knelt beside the Earthwoman. She held out the book to him, then she died. He caught the volume before it struck the wharf.

"My God! My God!" moaned Rastignac, stunned with grief and shock and sorrow. Sorrow for the woman and shock at the loss of the ship and the end of his plans for freedom.

Mapfarity ran up then and took the book from his nerveless hand. "She indicated that this is a manual for running the ship," he said. "All is not lost."

"It will be in a language we don't know," Rastignac whispered.

Archambaud came running up, shrilled, "The Amphibs have broken through and are coming down the street! Let's get to our boat before the whole bloodthirsty mob gets here!"

Mapfarity paid him no attention. He thumbed through the book, then reached down and lifted Rastignac from his crouching position by the corpse.

"There's hope yet, Jean-Jacques," he growled. "This book is printed with the same characters as those I saw in a book owned by a priest I knew. He said it was in Hebrew, and that it was the Holy Book in the original Earth language. This woman must be a citizen of the Republic of Israeli, which I understand was rising to be a great power on Earth at the time you French left.

"Perhaps the language of this woman has changed somewhat from the original tongue, but I don't think the alphabet has. I'll bet that if we get this to a priest who can read it—there are only a few left—he can translate it well enough for us to figure out everything."

They walked to the wharf's end and climbed down a ladder to a platform where a dory was tied up. As they rowed out to their sloop Mapfarity said:

"Look, Rastignac, things aren't as bad as they seem. If you haven't the ship nobody else has, either. And you alone have the key to its entrance and operation.

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For that you can thank the Church, which has preserved the ancient wisdom for emergencies which it couldn't forsee, such as this. Just as it kept the secret of wine, which will eventually be the greatest means for delivering our people from their bondage to the Skins and, thus enable them to fight the Amphibs back instead of being slaughtered.

"Meanwhile, we've a battle to wage. You will have to lead it. Nobody else but the Skinless Devil has the prestige to make the people gather around him. Once we accuse the Minister of Ill-Will of treason and jail him, without an official Breaker to release him, we'll demand a general election. You'll be made King of the Ssassaror; I, of the Terrans. That is inevitable, for we are the only skinless men and, therefore, irresistible. After the war is won, we'll leave for the stars. How do you like that?"

Rastignac smiled. It was weak, but it was a smile. His bracket-shaped eyebrows bent into their old sign of determination.

"You are right," he replied. "I have given it much thought. A man has no right to leave his native land until he's settled his problems here. Even if Lusine hadn't killed the Earthwoman and I had sailed away, my conscience wouldn't have given me any rest. I would have known I had abandoned the fight in the middle of it. But now that I have stripped myself of my Skin—which was a substitute for a conscience—and now that I am being forced to develop my own inward conscience, I must admit that immediate flight to the stars would have been the wrong thing."

The pleased and happy Mapfarity said, "And you must also admit, Rastignac, that things so far have had a way of working out for the best. Even Lusine, evil as she was, has helped towards the general good by keeping you on this planet. And the Church, though it has released once again the old evil of alcohol, has done more good by so doing than . . ."

But here Rastignac interrupted to say he did not believe in this particular school of thought, and so, while the howls of savage warriors drifted from the wharfs, while the structure of their world crashed around them, they plunged into that most violent and circular of all whirlpools—the Discussion Philosophical.

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a world apart

by . . . Sam Merwin Jr.

Most men of middle age would welcome a chance to live their lives a second time. But Coulter did not.

IT WASN'T MUCH of a bump. The shock absorbers of the liquid-smooth convertible neutralized all but a tiny percent of the jarring impact before it could reach the imported English flannel seat of Coulter's expensively-tailored pants. But it was sufficient to jolt him out of his reverie, trebly induced by a four-course luncheon with cocktails and liqueur, the nostalgia of returning to a home-town unvisited in twenty years and the fact that he was driving westward into an afternoon sun.

Coulter grunted mild resentment at being thus disturbed. Then, as he quickly, incredulously scanned the road ahead and the car whose wheel was gripped by his gloved hands, he narrowed his eyes and muttered to himself, "Wake up! For God's sake snap out of it!"

The road itself had changed. From a twin-laned ten-car highway, carefully graded and landscaped and clover-leafed, it had become a single-laned three-car thoroughfare, paved with tar instead of concrete and high-crowned along its center. He swung the wheel quickly to avoid

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For obvious reasons, since time-travel has yet to be invented as far as we know, science fiction authors usually attribute it to the future. Yet there is always the possibility that somewhere, somehow, somewhen, it has already been put to use. A possibility which Sammy Merwin here considers in highly intriguing and human terms. Let's go back with Coulter . . .

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running onto a dirt shoulder hardened with ice.

Its curves were no longer graded for high-speed cars but were scarcely tilted at all, when they didn't slant the wrong way. Its crossings were blind, level and unprotected by traffic lights. Neat unattractive clusters of mass-built houses interspersed with occasional clumps of woodland had been replaced with long stretches of pine woods, only occasionally relieved by houses and barns of obviously antique manufacture. Some of these looked disturbingly familiar.

And the roadside signs—all at once they were everywhere. Here a weathered but still-legible little Burma-Shave series, a wooden Horlick's contented cow, Socony, That Good Gulf Gasoline, the black cat-face bespeaking Catspaw Rubber Heels. Here were the coal-black Gold Dust twins, Kelly Springfield's Lotta Miles peering through a large rubber tire, a cocked-hatted boniface advertising New York's Prince George Hotel, the sleepy Fisk Tire boy in his pajamas and carrying a candle.

And then a huge opened book with a quill pen stuck in an inkwell alongside. On the right-hand page it said, *United States Tires Are Good Tires* and on the left, *You are 3½ miles from Lincolnville. In 1778 General O'Hara, leading a British raiding party inland, was ambushed on this spot by Colonel Amos Coulter and his militia and forced to retreat with heavy loss.*

Slowing down because the high-crowned road was slippery with sun-melted ice, Coulter noted that the steering wheel responded heavily. Then he saw suddenly that it was smaller than he'd remembered and made of black rubber instead of the almond-hued plastic of his new convertible. And his light costly fabric gloves had become black leather, lined with fur!

A gong rang in his memory. He had driven this road many times in years gone by, he had known all these signs as quasi-landmarks, he had worn such gloves one winter. There had been a little triangular tear in the heel of the left one, where he had snagged it on a nail sticking out of the garage wall. But that had been many years ago . . .

He looked and found the tear and felt cold sweat bathe his body under his clothes. And he was suddenly, mightily, afraid . . .

He hit another bump and this time the springs did not take up the shock. He felt briefly like a rodeo cowboy riding a bucking mustang. The car in which he rode had changed. It was no longer the sleek convertible of the mid-1950's. It was his old Pontiac sedan, the car he had driven for two years before leaving Lincolnville behind him twenty years ago!

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Nor was he wearing the dark-blue vicuna topcoat he had reclaimed an hour before from the checkroom girl in the restaurant back in the city. His sleeves now were of well-worn camel's hair. He didn't dare pull the rear-view mirror around so he could see his face. He said again, fiercely, "Snap out of it! For God's sake wake up before you hit something!"

He didn't hit anything. Road, signs, car, clothing, all stayed the same. Fields abridged by wooden low hills fell away on either side of the road. The snow had been heavier away from the city and covered tillage, trees and stone-walls alike with a tracked and sullen late-winter dark-white blanket.

He came to a hill and the obsolete engine knocked and panted. Once over the top of the hill, he thought with a sudden encouraging flash, he could prove that whatever was happening to him was illusion. At its foot on the other side had lain the Brigham Farm, a two-century-old house and barn converted into a restaurant by a pair of energetic spinsters. A restaurant where Coulter and his parents had habitually dined out on Thursday, the servants' night off.

He had heard a long while ago that the Brigham Farm had been struck by lightning and burned during August of 1939. If it were still there . . .

He breasted the hill and there it was, ancient timbers painted a neat dark red with white door and window-frames and shutters. He held his eyes carefully away from it after the one look, held them on the road, which was now paved with a hard-packed layer of snow.

He passed an ear-flapped and baa-baa-coated farmer who sat atop a pung drawn by a patient percheron whose nostrils emitted twin plumes of steam. A pung! How many times had he and the other boys of Lincolnville ridden the runners of such utility sleighs on hitch-hiked rides through the by-ways of the lovely surrounding countryside!

Coulter maneuvered in his seat to take a quick look at this relic from the past—and caught a glimpse of his face in the mirror above the windshield. He said just one word—*"Jesus!"* Nor was he blasphemous in saying it.

He thought of Jurgen, of Faust—for in some miraculous way he had reclaimed his youth or been reclaimed by it. The face that looked back at him was fresh-skinned, unlined, unweathered by life. He saw with surprise, from the detachment of almost two decades, that he had been better looking than he remembered.

He looked down, saw that his body, beneath the camel's hair coat, was thin. The fat and fatigue of too many years of rich eating and drinking, of sedentary work,

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of immense nervous pressures, had been swept away without diet, without tiresome exercise. He was young again—and he almost ran the Pontiac into a ditch at the side of the road . . .

If it was a dream, he decided, it was a dream he was going to enjoy. He recalled what Shaw had said about youth being such a wonderful thing it was a pity to waste it on children. And he knew that he, at any rate, was no child, whatever the body that had so miraculously been restored to him.

The unhappy Pontiac cleared another hilltop and Lincolnville lay stretched out before Coulter, naked and exposed, stripped of its summer foliage. He had forgotten how dominated it was by the five church steeples—Unitarian, Episcopal, Trinitarian, Roman Catholic and Swedish Reform. There was no spire atop the concrete-and-stucco pillared building in which the Christian Scientists held their Sunday readings.

Half-consciously he dug for a cigar in his breast pocket, looked with mild surprise on the straight-stemmed pipe he found there. He had forgotten that he once smoked a pipe as completely as he had forgotten the churchly domination of his home town.

Even though Lincolnville remained fixed in his memory as it had looked twenty years ago—as it looked now awaiting his belated return—he was aware of many anachronisms while tooling the Pontiac slowly along Clinton Street. He had become used to the many outer changes of the past two decades, was unable completely to suppress surprise at not finding them present on his return.

For one thing there was the vast amount of overhead wiring. Coulter had forgotten how its lacework of insulation and poles took up space even in a comparatively small community. He had long since forgotten the English sparrows, erstwhile avian pest of America, that were to vanish so swiftly with the final abolition of the horse.

There were more horses than he recalled, parked here and there among the shoppers' automobiles. And the cars themselves looked like refugees from a well-aged television movie, all straight-up-and-down windshields and unbuilt-in fenders and wooden spoked or wire wheels. He suspected the Pontiac he was driving would look as odd to him once he got out and examined it.

A dark-overcoated policeman, lounging against the front of the Rexall store at the main intersection, lifted a mittened hand in casual salute. Coulter replied in kind, drove on through the Center, took the fork past the old library with the skeleton of its summer coat of ivy looking bare and chilly against the sunset

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breeze. The bit of sky he could see through the houses and leafless trees was grey and yellow and cold.

The house was there, just as he had left it. It was still a good-sized mansion in comfortable ugly space-wasting Reign-of-Terror Tuscan, standing ornate and towered and turreted behind a fence of granite posts connected by long iron pipes that sagged in the middle as the result of children walking them on their way to and from the public schools around the corner on Sheldon Street.

Coulter turned left and felt the crunch of ashes under his tires as he drove across the sidewalk, through the fence opening, into the driveway to the open-doored garage awaiting him. He reminded himself to be careful of the jutting nail that had torn his glove.

The concrete floor of the garage felt cold against the soles of his shoes. Coulter stamped his feet as he turned on the heater and moved toward the door. It stuck —he had forgotten about that— and he swore lustily as he exerted strength he had forgotten ever possessing to yank it clear of the snag and across the front of the building.

He didn't want the Pontiac to freeze. Not when he had a date with Eve Lawton . . . A date with Eve Lawton . . . He hadn't thought of Eve in years, except on those occasional sleepless nights when he amused himself with seeking to visualize the women he had known in a Biblical sense of the word.

Most of them were faceless units in a faceless and somewhat undignified parade. But not Eve. She wasn't pretty—not in the sense of the doll-faced creatures that adorned the movie magazines or even the healthy maidens with whom he occasionally rollicked since coming home from college.

Eve had a sensitivity of feature that was a sounding board for her emotions. Coulter paused against the garage door and thought about her. With the knowledge of twenty years he knew now that what Eve had, or had had twenty years ago, was the basis of beauty, the inner intangible which stamps a woman a woman above other women . . .

What in hell has happened to me, is happening to me? Coulter felt the chill of the evening wind stab deep into his bones. Then he looked down at his vanished embonpoint and patted with his gloves the flat hardness that had replaced it. It was all right with him as long as he didn't wake up too soon—before his date with Eve anyway.

Coulter walked around the house and in through the front with its extra winter doorway. There was the big square sapphire-blue carpet with the worn spot at the foot of the stairs. There was the antique cherry card table which, to his definite knowledge,

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should be standing in the front hall of his own house in Scarborough, more than two hundred miles and twenty years away.

His mother appeared in the door of the library, edged with light from the cannel-coal fire in the grate behind her. She said, "Oh, there you are, Banny. I'm glad you're back in time for . . . Heaven's sake, Banny! What's all this for?"

Coulter felt himself grow hot with embarrassment. He and his mother had never been much given to outward show of affection. Yet, knowing she would be dead within the year, he had been unable to resist the urge to embrace her. He was going to have to watch his step. He said, fumbling a little, "I don't know, mother. I guess I just felt like it, that's all."

"Well—all right." She was mollified, patted the blue-white hair above delicately handsome features to make certain no strand had been disarranged. Then, "Did you remember to stop at MacAuliffe's and pick up my lighter?"

Feeling lost, Coulter felt in the pockets of his polo coat. To his relief he found a small package in one of them, pulled it out. It was wrapped with the city jeweler's tartan paper and he handed it to his mother. She said, "Thanks—I've missed it this last week."

He had forgotten his mother was a smoker. Coulter took off his coat and hat and hung them up, trying to remember details of a life he had long since allowed to blur into soft focus. She had taken up the habit about a year after his father died of a ruptured appendix while on a hunting trip down in the Maine woods.

He noticed the skis and ski-boots and skipoles standing at attention in the back of the closet, wondered if he could still execute a decent Christie. Then, emerging, he said, "Just us for dinner tonight, mother?"

"Just us," she said, regarding him with a faint frown from over a fresh-lit cigarette.

"Good!" he said. "How about a drink?"

"Banny," said his mother with patient sternness, "you know as well as I that you're the family liquor-provider since your father died. I'm not going to deal with bootleggers. And there's nothing but a little vermouth in the pantry."

"Snooping again," he said, carefully unsmiling. Good God, it was still Prohibition! Memory stabbed at him, bringing what had so recently emerged from past into present clearly into focus, technicolored focus. "I've got a little surprise upstairs in my closet."

He found himself taking the stairs two at a time without effort. Shaw had definitely been right, he decided when he discovered the exertion had not winded him in the slightest. He went into the

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big room overlooking the front lawn, now covered with much-trodden snow, that he had fallen heir to after his father died.

Karen, the Swedish-born second maid, was opening the bed. He had completely forgotten Karen, had to battle against staring at her. She was a perfect incipient human brood-mare—lush not-yet-fat figure, broad pelvis, meaningless pretty-enough face. Now what the devil had been his relations with *her?*

Since he couldn't remember he decided they must have been innocuous. He said, "Hi, Karen, broken up any new homes lately?"

She said, "Oh—*you,* Mr. Coulter!" She giggled and fled, stumbling over the threshold in her hurry.

Coulter looked after her, his eyebrows high. Well, he thought, here was something he had evidently missed entirely. Karen's crush was painfully apparent, viewed from a vantage of two decades of added experience. Or perhaps he had been smarter than he remembered.

The gallon of home-made gin was stuck behind the textbook-filled carton on the back floor of his closet, where somehow he had known it must be. It was between a third and half full of colorless liquid. He uncorked it, sniffed and shuddered. Prohibition was going to take a bit of getting used to after two decades of Repeal.

Half hour later he sipped his rather dire martini and listened to his mother talk. Not to the words especially, for she was one of those nearly-extinct well-bred women, brought up in the horse-hair amenities of the late Victorian era, who could talk charmingly and vivaciously and at considerable length without saying anything. It was pleasant merely to sit and sip and let the words flow over him.

She looked remarkably well, he thought, for a woman who was to die within a year of galloping cancer. She seemed to have recovered entirely from the emotional aftermath of his father's death. So much so that he found himself wondering how deeply she had loved the man with whom she had spent some thirty-eight years of her life.

She was slim and quick and sure in her movements and her figure, of which she was inordinately proud, resembled that of a girl rather than the body of a woman nibbling late middle-age. Slowly he realized she had stopped talking, had asked him a question and was awaiting his answer. He smiled apologetically and said, "Sorry, mother, I must have been wool-gathering."

"You're tired, lamb." No one had called him that in twenty years. "And no wonder, with all that *run*ning around for Mr. Simms on the *news*paper."

Mr. Simms—that would be Patrick "Paddy" Simms, his man-

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aging editor, the old-school city-room tyrant who had taught him his job so well that he had gone on to make a successful career of public relations and the organization of facts into words—at rates far more imposing than those paid a junior reporter during the Great Depression.

In his swell of memories Coulter almost lost his mother's question a second time, barely managed to catch its meaning. He sipped his drink and said, "I agree, mother, the burning of the books in Germany *is* a threat to freedom. But I don't think you'll have to worry about Adolph Hitler very long."

She misread his meaning, of course, frowned charmingly and said, "I *do* hope you're right, Banny. Nellie Maynard had a few of us for tea this afternoon and Margot Henson, she's tre*men*dously chic and her husband knows *all* those big men in the New Deal in Washington—not that he a*grees* with them, thank goodness—well, *she* says the big men in the State Department are really *wor*ried about Hitler. They think he may try to make Germany strong enough to start an*other* war."

"It could happen, of course," Coulter told her. He had forgotten his mother's trick of stressing one syllable of a word. Funny, Connie, his wife—if she was still his wife after whatever had happened—had the same trick. With an upper-case Manhattan dry soda-cracker drawl added.

He wondered if he were going to have to live through it all again—the NRA, the Roosevelt boomlet, the Recession, the string of Hitler triumphs in Europe, the war, Pearl Harbor and all that followed—Truman, the Cold War, Korea, McCarthy . . .

Seated across from her at the gleaming Sheraton dining table, which should by rights be in his own dining room in Scarborough overlooking the majestic Hudson, he wondered how he could put his foreknowledge to use. There was the market, of course. And he could recall the upset football win of Yale over Princeton in 1934, the Notre Dame last-minute triumph over Ohio State a year later, most of the World Series winners. On the Derby winners he was lost . . .

When the meal was over and they were returning to the library with its snug insulating bookshelves and warm cannel-coal fire, his mother said, "Banny, it's been so nice *hav*ing this talk with you. We haven't had *many* lately. I *wish* you'd stay home tonight with me. You really *do* look tired, you know."

"Sorry, mother," he replied. "I've got a date."

"With the *Law*ton girl, I suppose," she said without affection. Then, accepting a cigarette and holding it before lighting it, "I do wish you *wouldn't* see quite so

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much of her. I'll ad*mit* she's a perfectly nice girl, of course. But she *is* strange and people are be*gin*ning to talk. I hope you're not going to be *fool*ish about her."

"Don't worry," Coulter replied. Since when, he wondered, had wanting a girl as he wanted Eve Lawton been foolish. He added, "what's wrong with Eve anyway?"

His mother lit a cigarette. "Lamb, it's not that there's anything *really* wrong with Eve. As a matter of fact I be*lieve* her family is quite distinguished—good old *Lin*colnville stock."

"I'm aware of that," he replied drily. "I believe her great, great, great grandfather was a brigadier while mine was only a colonel in the Revolution."

His mother dismissed the distant past with a gesture. "But the Lawtons haven't *man*aged to keep up," she stated. "Think of your schooling, dear—you've had the *ver*y best. While Eve . . ." With a shrug.

"Went to grammar and high-school right here in Lincolnville," Coulter finished for her. "Mother, Eve has more brains and character than any of the debs I know." Then, collecting himself, "But don't worry, mother—I'm not going to let it upset my life."

"I'm *ver*y glad to hear it," Mrs. Coulter said simply. "Re*mem*ber, Banny, you and your Eve are a world apart. Besides, we're going to take a trip a*broad* this summer. There's *so* much I want us to see to*gether*. It would be a shame to . . ." She let it hang.

Coulter looked at his mother, remembering hard. He had been able to stymie that trip on the excuse that he'd almost certainly lose his job and that new jobs were too hard to get in a depression era. He thought that his surviving parent was, beneath her well-mannered surface, a shallow, domineering, snobbish empress. Granted his new vista of vision, he realized for the first time how she had dominated both his father and himself.

He thought, *I hate this woman. No, not hate, just loathe.*

He glanced at the watch on his wrist, a Waltham he had long since lost or broken or given away—he couldn't recall which. He said, "All the same, mother, a date's a date. I'm a little late now. Don't wait up for me."

"I shan't," she replied, looking after him with a frown of pale concern as he headed for the hall closet.

It took a few minutes to get the Pontiac warmed up but once out of the driveway Coulter knew the way to Eve Lawton's house as if he had been there last night, not two decades earlier. The small cold winter moon cast its frigid light over an intimate little group of apple tapioca clouds and made the snow-clad fields a dark grey beneath the black evergreens that backed the fields beside the road.

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As he slowed to a stop in front of the old white frame house with its graceful utilitarian lines of roof and gable, he found himself wondering whether this were the dream or the other—the twenty years that had found him an orphan. That had given him enough inherited money to strike out for himself in New York. That had seen him win success as a highly-paid publicist. That had seen him married to wealthy Connie Marlin and a way of life as far from that of Lincolnville as he himself now was from Scarborough and Connie.

Eve opened the door before he reached it. She was as willowy and alive as he remembered her, and a great deal more vital and beautiful. She put up her face to be kissed as soon as he was inside and his arms went around her soft angora sweater and he wondered a little at what he had so cavalierly dismissed and left behind him.

She said, "You're late, Banning. I thought you'd forgotten."

He kept one arm around her as they walked into the living room with its blazing fire. He said, "Sorry. Mother wanted to talk."

"Is she terribly worried about me?" Eve asked. Her face, in inquiry, was like a half-opened rose.

Coulter hesitated, then replied, "I think so, darling. She was afraid your stock had gone to seed. I had to remind her that your great, great, great grandfather outranked mine."

The odd, in her case beautiful, blankness of fear smoothed Eve's forehead. She said, her voice low, her eyes not meeting his, "Yesterday you'd never have noticed what she was thinking."

"Yesterday?" He forced her to look at him. "Yesterday I was another man—a whole twenty-four hours younger." He added the last hastily, so as not to rouse suspicion. Eve, he both knew at once and remembered, was highly sensitive, intuitively brilliant.

"I know," she said simply and for the second time since the amazing transformation of the afternoon he felt the tight grip of terror. Watching her as she turned from him and began to stoke the fire, he wondered just what she did know.

The album rested on the table against the back of the sofa in front of the fireplace. It was a massive leather-and-parchment tome, with imitation medieval brass clasps and hinges. He opened it carelessly, seeking reassurance in idle action.

He flipped the pages idly, in bunches. There was Eve, a lacy little moppet, held in the arms of her drunkard farming father. A sort of local mad-Edison whose inventions never worked or, if they did, were promptly stolen from him by more profit-minded promoters. Her brother Jim, sturdy, cowlicked, squinting into

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the sun, stood at his father's knee. He wondered what had happened to Jim but didn't dare ask. Presumably he should know since Jim shared the house with his sister and an ancient housekeeper, doubtless long since asleep.

He flipped more pages, came to a snapshot of Eve in a bathing suit at Lake Tahog. Bill Something-or-other, Lincolnville High School football hero of five years before, had an arm around Eve's slim, wool-covered waist. Two-piece suits and bikinis were still a long way in the future. He said, "What's become of Bill?"

She said, "Don't you remember? He was killed in that auto crash coming home from the city last year." There was an odd questing flatness in her voice.

Coulter remembered the incident now, of course. There had been a girl in the car, who had been disfigured for life. Plastic surgery, like bikinis, still lay well ahead. He and Eve had begun going together right after that accident . . .

Something about Eve's tone, some urgency, disturbed him. He looked at her quickly. She was standing by the fireplace, watching him, watching him as if he were doing something important. The fright within him renewed itself. Quickly he turned back to the album, flipped further pages.

He was close to the end of the album. What he saw was a newspaper clipping, a clipping showing himself and Harvey MacIlwaine of Consolidated Motors shaking hands at a banquet table. The headline above the picture read, AUTHOR AND AUTO MAGNET CELEBRATE BIOGRAPHY.

Above the headline was the date: *January 16, 1947.*

With hard-forced deliberation, because every nerve in his body was singing its song of fear like a banjo string, Coulter closed the album. The honeymoon, if that was the right term for it, was over. He knew now which was the dream, which the reality.

He said, "All of this is your doing, Eve." It was not a question.

She said quietly, "That's right, Banning, it's my doing." She looked at him with a cool detachment that added to his bewilderment—and to his fright.

He said, "Why, Eve? *Why* have you done this?"

She said, "Banning, do you know what a Jane Austen villain is?"

He shook his head. "Hardly my pitch, is it?"

"Hardly." There was a trace of sadness in her voice. Then, "A Jane Austen villain is an attractive, powerful, good-natured male who rides through life rough-shod, interested only in himself, completely unaware of his effect on those unlucky souls whose existences become entangled in his."

"And I am a Jane Austen villain?" He was puzzled, disturbed that anyone—Eve or anyone—

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should think of him as a villain. Mentally he began to search for kindnesses, for unselfishnesses. He found generosities, yes, but these, he supposed with sudden dreadful clarity, had been little more than balm to his ego.

"You are perhaps a classic example, Banning," she told him. Her face, in shadow, was exquisitely beautiful. "When you left Lincolnville twenty years ago, without seeing me, without letting me see you, you destroyed me."

"Good God!" Coulter exclaimed. "But how? I know it was rude, but I did mean to come back. And when things moved differently it seemed better to keep a clean break clean." He hesitated, added, "I'm sorry."

"Sorry that you destroyed me?" Her tone was acid-etched.

"Dammit, do you want me down on my knees?" he countered. "How the devil did my leaving destroy *you?*" Anger, prodded by fear, was warming his blood.

"I was sensitive—aware of the collapse of my family, of my own shortcomings, of my lack of opportunity," she said, staring with immense grey eyes at the wall behind him. "I was just beginning to feel I could be somebody, could mean something to someone I—liked—when you dropped me and never looked back.

"I took a job at the bank. For twenty years I've sat in a cage, counting out money and putting little legends in bank-books. I've felt myself drying up day by day, week by week, year by year. When I've sought love I've merely defiled myself. You taught me passion, Banning, then destroyed my capacity to enjoy it with anyone but you. You destroyed me and never even knew it."

"You could have gone out into the world," he said with a trace of contempt. "Other girls have."

"Other girls are not me," Eve replied steadily. "Other girls don't give themselves to a man as completely as I gave myself to you."

"What can I do now?" Coulter asked, running a hand through his newly crew-cut hair. Recalling Eve at dinner, seeing her in the doorway, holding her briefly in his arms—he had almost decided that in this new life she was the partner he would carry with him.

Now, however, he was afraid of her. It was Eve who had, in some strange way, brought him back twenty years for purposes she had yet to divulge. One thing he knew, logically and intuitively—he could never endure life with anyone of whom he was frightened.

She was no longer looking at the wall—she was looking directly at him and with curious intensity. She said, "Do you have to ask?"

She was testing him, of course. Sensitive, brilliant, she might be—yet she was a fool not to have judged the effect of his fear of

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her. He walked around the table, took hold of her shoulders, turned her to face him, said, "What has this particular evening to do with bringing me—us—back?"

"Everything!" she said, her eyes suddenly ablaze. *"Everything,* Banning! Can't you understand?"

He released her, lit himself a cigarette, seeking the calmness he knew he must have to keep his thinking clear. He said, "Perhaps I understand why—a little. But how, Eve, *how?"*

She got up and walked across the wide hearth, kicked a fallen log back into place. Its glowing red scales burst into yellow flame. She turned and said, "Remember my father's last work? His efforts to discover the secrets of Time?"

"I remember he threw away what should have been your inheritance on a flock of crackpot ideas," he told her.

"This wasn't a crackpot idea," she said, eyeing him as if he were another log for the fire. "His basic premise that Time is all-existent was sound. Time is past, present and future."

"I might have argued that with you—before today," he replied.

"It was like everything else he tried." She made an odd little gesture of helplessness. "He went at it wrong-end-to, of course. Not until after he died and Jim got back from M.I.T. did we get to work on it. I was merely the helper who held the tools for Jim. And when we completed it *he* lacked the courage to try it out." There was the acid of contempt in her voice at her brother's poltroonery.

"I don't blame him," said Coulter. "After all . . ." He changed the subject, asked, "Where *is* Jim?"

"He was killed at Iwo Jima," she told him.

"What's to keep him from walking in here tonight—or to keep *you* from walking in on us?" he asked.

"Jim's in Cambridge, studying for exams," she replied. "As for my meeting myself, it's impossible. It's hard to explain but in coming back here I became reintegrated with the past me. Just as you are both a present and a past you. You must have noticed a certain duplication of memories, an overlapping? *I* have."

"I've noticed," he said. "But *why* only we two?"

"I'll show you," she said. "Come." She led him down rough wooden cellar stairs to a basement, unfastened with pale and dexterous fingers a padlocked wooden door behind the big old-fashioned furnace with its upcurving stovepipe arms, under which he had to stoop to avoid bumping his head.

The sharp sting of dead furnace-ashes was in his nostrils as he looked at the strange device. The strange cage-like device, the strange jerry-built apparatus

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was centered in a bizarre instrument-panel that seemed to hang from nothing at all. He said, eyeing a bucket-seat for the operator, "It looks like Red Barber's catbird seat, Eve."

"And we're sitting in it, just you and I, darling," she replied. "Just you and I out of all the people who ever lived. Think of what we can do with our lives now, the mistakes we can avoid!"

"I'm thinking of them," said Coulter. Then, after a brief pause, "But how in hell did you manage to get *me* into the act?"

She stepped inside the odd cage, plucked things from a cup-like receptacle that hung from the instrument panel, showed them to him. There were a lock of hair, a scarf, what looked like fingernail parings. At his bewilderment her face lighted briefly with the shadow of a smile.

She said, "These are *you*, darling. Oh, you *still* don't understand! Lacking the *person* or *thing* to be sent back in Time, something that is part of the person or thing will work. It keys directly to individual patterns."

"And you've kept those things —those pieces of me—in there all this time?" He shuddered. "It looks like voodoo to me."

She put back the mementos, stepped out of the cage, put her arms fiercely around him. "Banning, darling, after you left me I *did* try voodoo. I wanted you to suffer as I suffered. But then, when the Time machine was finished and Jim was afraid to use it, I put the things in it—and waited. It's been a long wait."

"How did it reach me while I was still miles away?" he asked.

"Jim always said its working radius was about five miles," she said. "When you drove within range, it took over . . . But let's go back upstairs, darling—we have our lives to plan."

To change the subject Coulter said, when they emerged from the basement, "You must have had a time picking the right moment for this little reunion—or was it hit or miss?"

"The machine is completely accurate," she said firmly. She stood there, the firelight making a halo of her dark hair. There was urgency in her, an expectation that the remark would mean something to him. It didn't.

Finally she burst out with, "Banning, are you really so forgetful? Don't you remember what tonight was . . . *don't* you?"

Coulter did some hasty mental kangaroo-hopping. He knew it was important to Eve and because of the incredible thing she had accomplished he felt a new wave of fright. From some recess of his memory he got a flash—Jim was in Cambridge, the housekeeper asleep in the rear ell of the old farmhouse, he and Eve were alone.

He drew her gently close to him and kissed her soft waiting lips as

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he had kissed them twenty years before, felt the quiver of her slim body against him as he had felt it twenty years before. He should have known—Eve had selected for their reunion the anniversary of the first time they had truly given themselves to each other.

He said, "Of course I remember, darling. If I'm a little slow on the uptake it's because I've had a lot of things happen to me all at once."

"The old Banning Coulter would never have understood," she said, giving him a quick hug before standing clear of him. Her eyes were shining like star sapphires. "Banning, you've grown up!"

"People do," he said drily. There was an odd sort of tension between them as they stood there, knowing what was to happen between them. Eve took a deep unsteady breath and the rise and fall of her angora sweater made his arms itch to pull her close.

She said, before he could translate desire into action, "Oh, I've been so *wrong* about so many things, darling. But I was so *right* to bring you back. Think of what we're going to be able to do, you and I together, now that we have this second chance. We'll know just what's going to happen. We'll be rich and free and lord it over ordinary mortals. I'll have furs and you'll have yachts and we'll . . ."

"I'm a lousy sailor," said Coulter. "No, I don't want a yacht."

"Nonsense, we'll have a yacht and cruise wherever we want to go. Think of how easy it will be for us to make money." Her eyes were shining more brightly still. "No more standing in a teller's cage for me. No more feeling the life-sap dry up inside me, handling thousands of dollars a day and none of it mine."

She stepped to him, gripped him tightly, her fingernails making themselves felt even through the heavy material of his jacket. She kissed him fiercely and said in a throaty whisper, "Darling, I'm going upstairs. Come up in ten minutes—and be young again with me."

She left him standing alone in front of the fire . . .

Coulter filled his pipe and lit it. His mother had said *we* when she talked of her plans, as if her son were merely an object to be moved about at her whim. *Pick up my lighter at MacAuliffe's . . . going to take a trip abroad this summer . . . not going to be foolish about her . . .* He could see the phrases as vividly as if they were written on a video teleprompter.

And then he saw another set of phrases—different in content, yet strangely alike in meaning. *Nonsense, we'll have a yacht . . . lord it over ordinary mortals . . . a long wait.* He thought of the voodoo and the fingernail parings, of the savage materialism of the

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woman who was even now preparing herself to receive him upstairs, who was planning to relive his life with him in *her* image.

He thought of his wife, foolish perhaps, but true to him and never domineering. He thought of the Scarborough house and the good friends he had there, hundreds of miles and twenty years away. He wondered if he could go back if he got beyond the five-mile radius of the strange machine in the basement.

He looked down with regret at his slim young body, so unexpectedly regained—and thought of the heavier, older less vibrant body that lay waiting for him five miles away. Then swiftly, silently, he tiptoed into the hall, donned coat and hat and gloves, slipped through the front door and bolted for the Pontiac.

He drove like a madman over the icy roads through the dark. Somehow he sensed he would have to get beyond the reach of the machine before Eve grew impatient and came downstairs and found him gone. She might, in her anger, send him back to some other Time—or perhaps the machine worked both ways. He didn't know. He could only flee in fear . . . and hope . . .

At times, in the years that had passed since his abrupt breaking-off of his romance with Eve Lawton, he had wondered a little about why he had dropped her so quickly, just when his mother's death seemed to open the path for their marriage.

Now he knew that youthful instinct had served him better than he knew. Somehow, beneath the charm and wit and beauty of the girl he had sensed the domineering woman. Perhaps a lifetime with his mother had made him extra-aware of Eve's desire to dominate without its reaching his conscious mind.

But to have exchanged the velvet glove of his mother for the velvet glove of Eve would have meant a lifetime of bondage. He would never have been his own man, never . . .

He could feel cold sweat bathe his body once more as he sped past the Brigham Farm. According to his wristwatch just eight and a quarter minutes had elapsed since Eve had left him and gone upstairs. He felt a sudden urge to turn around and go back to her—he knew she would forgive his attempt to run away. After all, he couldn't even guess at what would happen when he reached the outer limit of the machine's influence. Would he be in 1934 or 1954—or irretrievably lost in some timeless nowhere at all?

He thought again of what Eve had said about yachts and world traveling and wondered how she could hope to do so if the radius of influence was only five miles. Eve might be passionate, head-

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strong and neurotic but she was not a fool. If she had planned travel on a world of two decades past she must have found a way of making his and her stay in that past permanent, without trammels.

If she had altered the machine . . . But she wouldn't have until he was caught in her trap when, inevitably, he returned to look at the scenes of his childhood. He tried to recall what she had done, what gestures she had made, when she demonstrated the machine. As nearly as he could remember, all Eve had done was to pluck out his nail parings, the bit of hair and scarf, then return them to their receptacle.

Voodoo . . . She was close to mad. Or perhaps he was mad himself. He wiped his streaming forehead with a sleeve, barely avoided overturning as he rounded a curve flanked by signboards . . .

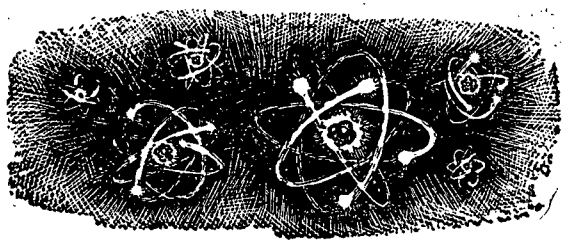
He felt a bump . . .

And suddenly he was in the big convertible again, guiding it over to one of the parking lanes at the side of the magnificent two-laned highway. He looked down at his sleek dark vicuna coat, visualized the rise of plump stomach beneath it, reached in his breast pocket for a panatella.

He noticed the tremble in his hand. *No, no cigars now,* he thought. *Not with the old pump acting up like this. Too much excitement.* He reached for the little box of nitro-glycerin tablets in his watch-pocket, got it out, took one, waited.

Maybe his life wasn't perfect, maybe there wasn't much of it left to live—but what there was was his, not his mother's, not Eve's. The unsteadiness in his chest was fading. He turned on the ignition, drove slowly back through the housing developments, the neon signs and clover-leaf turns and graded crossings toward the city . . .

When he got back to the hotel he would call Connie in Scarborough. It would be heavenly, the sound of her high, silly little voice . . .



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the hitch-hiker's package

by . . . Jack Williamson

Both were on their way home. And Jason Garvie was sorry for the thin little man with the package of paper under his arm.

THE PASSING CAR, a long black roadster, had cut sharply in ahead of his sedan; and for a moment Jason Garvie had been sick and faint with anticipation of catastrophe for a crash was surely unavoidable. Indeed, there had been a sharp and sudden sound like the harsh snapping of a steel spring as the two machines touched fenders.

But the low-slung roadster was drawing swiftly ahead of him now, on the glistening black pavement and Jason put his foot back on the accelerator, and the sedan purred smoothly forward again.

Queer how upset he felt! His legs weak and trembling, and a feeling of nausea in the pit of his stomach. He ought to have something done for his nerves if every little tight place in traffic was to make him feel this way.

He pressed harder on the accelerator. Half a state to cross yet before he got home. He must hold out to make it. The nervous strain of this long trip had worn him down. But soon he would be home, where he could rest. *Home. . . .* He whispered the word, with a feeling of quiet satisfaction.

Ever-reliant and always-popular Jack Williamson has once again given us a distinctly different story in his freshly-minted version of an old tale. When you've finished with the frighteningly uncanny experience of Jason Garvie you're sure to wonder about it for a long, long time. As we did.

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"Pretty close scrape, eh?" he said to the man at his side.

There was no answer and he turned his head to glance at his companion, wondering if he had been frightened by the narrow escape from disaster.

Jason did not often pick up hitch-hikers. There had been so many stories of hitch-hikers robbing their casual benefactors that he had abandoned the practise. But something about this young man as he stood with a package under his arm near the roadside filling station, had made Jason Garvie break his habitual rule.

The man was meek looking, thin and he wore a smudged and battered hat and coat that had evidently been slept in. Unpressed trousers worn and soiled about the cuffs, unpolished shoes broken at the sides added up to a forlorn picture. The newspaper-wrapped parcel was clutched tightly under his thin arm.

But his face, haggard and unshaven though it might be, was somehow firm with determination. The thin shoulder straight with purpose. Dark, sunken eyes gleamed with fixed resolve. It was his attitude, somehow expressive of calm, unflinching determination that had made Jason stop beside him and open the door.

"A pretty close shave, wasn't it?" Jason repeated now as he turned to the hitch-hiker.

Then his mouth dropped open in astonishment, and he felt suddenly foolish.

The man was gone! The seat beside him was empty!

He had been there beside him on the seat a moment before the black roadster cut in front of them. Sitting motionless, holding the package in his lap, his determined, sunken eyes staring straight ahead. Jason had glanced at the man out of the corner of his eyes once or twice although the fellow had not uttered a dozen words since he got into the car back by the filling station.

Now the hitch-hiker was gone. But the parcel, neatly wrapped in newspaper, lay on the seat where he had sat.

Jason's weary brain struggled now for an explanation. Queer that the fellow had got out of the car without his noticing. Must have become frightened when the black roadster swung in against them and Jason jammed his foot on the brake. Certainly he had slowed enough for the man to leave the car. He had been so preoccupied with avoiding collision that he had not seen him open the door and leap out. That must be the answer. . . .

He wondered what was in the package. A lunch, probably; possibly spare shirt and socks. Nothing, he hoped, that the fellow would greatly miss.

Then it occurred to him that the man might have been hurt as he leaped from the car. Jason

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had not been able to stop completely before the black roadster had drawn past with that queer, abrupt snapping sound.

For a moment he considered turning back to find the man and give him the package. But he was now more eager than ever to reach home. He *must* be home by night. He was unused to driving such a long distance as he had done on this trip and the strain of it was becoming intolerable.

The man had probably got out quietly because he was nervous about Jason's driving and didn't want to embarrass him by saying so. He would get another ride easily.

So Jason's mind turned again to home, where he would soon stroll about the garden, eat his supper comfortably. Yes, he would take a hot bath, lie back in it and free himself from this depressing strain of the long trip. . . .

But after a while he remembered the package and began to muse about his responsibility concerning it. At the next stop for gas he would open it. If there was identification in it he would mail it to the fellow. If not, he would leave it at the filling station with a description of its owner, in case he stopped there in another car.

Two hours he drove on before he turned in at a filling station for gas.

As he had seen the station rise out of the horizon ahead of him he automatically slowed, turned off the highway and upon the graded dirt road that led to the station. A road dry under the blazing summer sun, dust rising from it in stifling clouds that filled the air chokingly and settled in a white film on the weeds beside the road.

The gas station seemed to be farther from the highway than it had appeared at a distance. He rode along the dusty country road, passing a bright field of emerald-green cotton, a patch of corn with drooping, withered leaves. And somehow it all looked very familiar although he had not passed this way before.

Even as he wondered about this he drove swiftly on through the swirling dust, gripping the wheel with fierce eagerness as he remembered that he was going home. Home was not far away now. . . .

Then, abruptly he remembered that his home was *not* near here; it was in another state. But the sense of nearness to home remained, became overwhelmingly stronger; the resisting element in his mind surrendered and he stopped trying to reason away the illusion.

A clear image of the village where he lived came to his mind. Clustered dingy buildings of red brick, behind straggling dust-laden trees, along white-hot, dusty streets. The bank was the build-

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ing that seemed most familiar, as if he had been in it many times. An ugly structure of concrete blocks, with a sign of glass and gilt.

"Lanesboro . . . Lanesboro . . . " The name of the village throbbed through his mind.

But one part of Jason's mind knew that he had never been in a Lanesboro; he could not recall that he had even heard of it.

He drove along the streets of the village now among scattered wooden residences with lawns of sere and dusty grass, through a little cluster of business houses. It was all just as he had imagined it.

The bank, a black, ugly building of concrete blocks, was closed, and had the atmosphere of desolation that clings to a building long deserted. But the sign of glass and gilt was still distinct:

STATE BANK OF LANESBORO
Capital and Surplus, $150,000
Peter Catlin, President

A curious feeling of relief and elation filled Jason; the pleasure of returning to a spot he had known well and for long years . . . though he had never been in this town before. And a sharp pang of regret pierced him when he saw that the bank was closed and deserted.

Jason drove through the town without stopping. A mile beyond it he left the dusty, graded roadway, and turned into the faint, parallel ruts of a little used road. He drove automatically, seeming to sense the bumps before the car reached them. Eager exultation overflowed in him. He was near home . . . very near. . . .

He stopped before a two-story house that stood alone beside a field of dusty cotton. A thrill had come into him at first sight of its time-faded shingles. With a poignant, almost painful satisfaction he surveyed its weather-boarded walls, showing gray beneath peeling white paint. Mingled feelings of joy and sorrow surged up in him as he gazed across the wide, bare yard, unkept and littered with rubbish, scattered with the grim, spreading skeletons of a few dead fruit-trees. Vague, fleeting images rose in his mind now, like memories of memories of many years spent here—yet he had not seen the house before this day!

He stopped the engine, took up the package wrapped in newspaper as he got out of the car. It was an automatic gesture, but somehow natural. With the package in his hand he ran up the walk of worn red bricks, onto the sagging porch. Eager and insistent yearning hastened his footsteps. He was trembling with mingled anticipation and anxiety.

He rapped hard upon the weather-stained door. There was no sound from within. He waited a moment, then flung open the door and entered a long room, dark and dingily furnished. A

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wrinkled, white-haired Negro woman in faded blue calico was tottering across the floor, coming toward him.

She stopped, smiled a sudden, toothless but joyous smile, and cried in shrill, eager tones: "Davy! David Catlin! You done come home!"

Jason knew that David Catlin was not his name. But the sound of it brought suddenly to his mind a thousand memories, all connected with this house and the village he had just passed.

A curious tenderness filled him at sight of the aged negress. He ran to her, reached for her hand. Her skinny arms embraced him wildly; then she turned and ran out of the room, screaming shrilly:

"Miss Jane! Miss Jane! Davy's done come back! Miss Jane!"

Jason followed her across the room, holding the newspaper parcel in his hand. It didn't occur to him to put it down even as he passed a table.

A slight, frail, brown-eyed woman walked into the room and he seized her thin body instinctively in his arms, still holding the package in one hand. He found himself repeating brokenly:

"Ma! Ma, I've come back!"

For a long time the frail woman was silent in his arms, her narrow shoulders shaken with sobs, her brown eyes turned up to his face, full of tears. Then she murmured:

"Davy—Davy—Davy! My boy! It's been so long . . ."

Jason led her gently away from him. She sat down weakly on a kitchen chair. Then he became aware of the package, and began swiftly to open it.

And he said, as if another mind were speaking with his tongue:

"I've brought it back, Ma. All of it. Every cent. I hope it hasn't been too hard for you, Ma."

She stared at him mutely from the chair, brown eyes big and questioning.

"I was sorry as soon as I had time to think," the voice in him went on. "I never spent any of it. But they were after me and I didn't dare come back. Even when I read that the bank had failed because of my theft and that Pa had killed himself, I still didn't return. I didn't have the courage. Not until now. Today I knew I had to come. And it's all here, I tell you. I didn't spend a penny."

The package was open now, in his hands. There was a flimsy cardboard shoe-box inside the newspaper. And the box was filled with paper currency and bonds, tied in neat little bundles. He dumped them from the box, into the frail woman's lap.

She looked down at them for a moment. Then the shining brown eyes were lifted to his face again.

"Davy!" she murmured. "Davy! Davy, my son!" . . .

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"Hurt much, Mister?" a gruff voice was asking, and the sound of it seemed to reach him through a deep haze, dimly.

Then Jason felt hands tugging at his body, and there was a white flash of pain at the back of his skull. He groaned as burning agony flamed through his chest.

They were lifting him from the wreckage of his sedan that lay beside the glistening hot pavement. The long black roadster that had cut sharp in front of him was stopped a few yards ahead. Behind it was a queue of cars and curious people leaning from them.

A still body lay on the pavement beside Jason. The hitch-hiker. The man he had picked up back at the filling station. The wrinkled coat was bloody, now, and the thin face almost unrecognizable. But he knew it was the man who had carried the newspaper package.

"He's dead," they told Jason. "Skull crushed. Died instantly when your car turned over."

"Don't know him," Jason gasped through mists of pain. "Just picked him up."

"He has a letter in his pocket addressed to David Catlin," they said.

Jason Garvie shook his throbbing head, trying to remember. Then he said, "Where's the package? He had a bundle . . . a box wrapped in newspaper. . . . "

There was no package. The crowd fanned out, searched all around the wreckage, even deep in the fields alongside the road.

But they never found David Catlin's package.

The next big issue will, as usual, contain a round baker's dozen of the most excitingly different stories in the field—cautiously, lovingly culled after perusing the many hundreds coming King-Size-way. Knowing your preferences by now, naturally many yarns are turned out expressly for us. Most of you may recall that in our very first issue we maintained, "Although what we are offering in FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *is technically a periodical (magazine, if you will) it is also an effort to give our readers an anthology of top-level stories by the best authors available. And every single story is brand new!" Which, accurately speaking, friends, is an inexorable truth that the higher-priced, cloth-bound books edited by anthologists can't claim—for they use reprints. So, in the next issue you'll get another grand anthology turned out by the editors of* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *with splendid fiction by good science fiction writers, in name or in high, memorable quality. You'll find the rare kind of stories you go to bed thinking about.*

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the calm man

by . . . Frank Belknap Long

Sally watched the molten gold glow in the sky. Then knew she would not see her son and her husband ever again on Earth.

SALLY ANDERS had never really thought of herself as a wallflower. A girl could be shy, couldn't she, and still be pretty enough to attract and hold men?

Only this morning she had drawn an admiring look from the milkman and a wolf cry from Jimmy on the corner, with his newspapers and shiny new bike. What if the milkman was crowding sixty and wore thick-lensed glasses? What if Jimmy was only seventeen?

A male was a male, and a glance was a glance. Why, if I just primp a little more, Sally told herself, I'll be irresistible.

Hair ribbons and perfume, a mirror tilted at just the right angle, an invitation to a party on the dresser—what more did a girl need?

"Dinner, Sally!" came echoing up from the kitchen. "Do you want to be late, child?"

Sally had no intention of being late. Tonight she'd see him across a crowded room and her heart would skip a beat. He'd look at her and smile, and come straight toward her with his shoulders squared.

There was always one night in a girl's life that stands above all

Dip the pen of a Frank Belknap Long into a bottle of ink and the result is always bound to be a scintillating piece of brilliant imaginative science fiction. And he's done it again in the tortured story of Sally.

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other nights. One night when the moon shone bright and clear and the clock on the wall went *tick tock, tick tock, tick tock.* One night when each tick said, "You're beautiful! Really beautiful!"

Giving her hair a final pat Sally smiled at herself in the mirror.

In the bathroom the water was still running and the perfumed bath soap still spread its aromatic sweet odor through the room. Sally went into the bathroom and turned off the tap before going downstairs to the kitchen.

"My girl looks radiant tonight!" Uncle Ben said, smiling at her over his corned beef and cabbage.

Sally blushed and lowered her eyes.

"Ben, you're making her nervous," Sally's mother said, laughing.

Sally looked up and met her uncle's stare, her eyes defiant. "I'm not bad looking whatever you may think," she said.

"Oh, now, Sally," Uncle Ben protested. "No sense in getting on a high horse. Tonight you may find a man who just won't be able to resist you."

"Maybe I will and maybe I won't," Sally said. "You'd be surprised if I did, wouldn't you?"

It was Uncle Ben's turn to lower his eyes.

"I'll tell the world you've inherited your mother's looks, Sally," he said. "But a man has to pride himself on something. My defects of character are pretty bad. But no one has ever accused me of dishonesty."

Sally folded her napkin and rose stiffly from the table.

"Good night, Uncle," she said.

When Sally arrived at the party every foot of floor space was taken up by dancing couples and the reception room was so crowded that, as each new guest was announced, a little ripple of displeasure went through the men in midnight blue and the women in Nile green and lavender.

For a moment Sally did not move, just stood staring at the dancing couples, half-hidden by one of the potted palms that framed the sides of the long room.

Moonlight silvered her hair and touched her white throat and arms with a caress so gentle that simply by closing her eyes she could fancy herself already in his arms.

Moonlight from tall windows flooding down, turning the dancing guests into pirouetting ghosts in diaphanous blue and green, scarlet and gold.

Close your eyes, Sally, close them tight! Now open them! That's it . . . Slowly, slowly . . .

He came out of nothingness into the light and was right beside her suddenly.

He was tall, but not too tall. His face was tanned mahogany brown, and his eyes were clear and very bright. And he stood there looking at her steadily until her mouth opened and a little gasp flew out.

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He took her into his arms without a word and they started to dance . . .

They were still dancing when he asked her to be his wife.

"You'll marry me, of course," he said. "We haven't too much time. The years go by so swiftly, like great white birds at sea."

They were very close when he asked her, but he made no attempt to kiss her. They went right on dancing and while he waited for her answer he talked about the moon . . .

"When the lights go out and the music stops the moon will remain," he said. "It raises tides on the Earth, it inflames the minds and hearts of men. There are cyclic rhythms which would set a stone to dreaming and desiring on such a night as this."

He stopped dancing abruptly and looked at her with calm assurance.

"You *will* marry me, won't you?" he asked. "Allowing for a reasonable margin of error I seriously doubt if I could be happy with any of these other women. I was attracted to you the instant I saw you."

A girl who has never been asked before, who has drawn only one lone wolf cry from a newsboy could hardly be expected to resist such an offer.

Don't resist, Sally. He's strong and tall and extremely good looking. He knows what he wants and makes up his mind quickly. Surely a man so resolute must make enough money to support a wife.

"Yes," Sally breathed, snuggling close to him. "Oh, yes!"

She paused a moment, then said, "You may kiss me now if you wish, my darling."

He straightened and frowned a little, and looked away quickly. "That can wait," he said.

They were married a week later and went to live on an elm-shaded street just five blocks from where Sally was born. The cottage was small, white and attractively decorated inside and out. But Sally changed the curtains, as all women must, and bought some new furniture on the installment plan.

The neighbors were friendly folk who knew her husband as Mr. James Rand, an energetic young insurance broker who would certainly carve a wider swath for himself in his chosen profession now that he had so charming a wife.

Ten months later the first baby came.

Lying beneath cool white sheets in the hospital Sally looked at the other women and felt so deliriously happy she wanted to cry. It was a beautiful baby and it cuddled close to her heart, its smallness a miracle in itself.

The other husbands came in and sat beside their wives, holding on tight to their happiness. There were flowers and smiles, whispers

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that explored bright new worlds of tenderness and rejoicing.

Out in the corridor the husbands congratulated one another and came in smelling of cigar smoke.

"Have a cigar! That's right. Eight pounds at birth. That's unusual, isn't it? Brightest kid you ever saw. Knew his old man right off."

He was beside her suddenly, standing straight and still in shadows.

"Oh, darling," she whispered. "Why did you wait? It's been three whole days."

"Three days?" he asked, leaning forward to stare down at his son. "Really! It didn't seem that long."

"Where were you? You didn't even phone!"

"Sometimes it's difficult to phone," he said slowly, as if measuring his words. "You have given me a son. That pleases me very much."

A coldness touched her heart and a despair took hold of her. "It pleases you! Is that all you can say? You stand there looking at me as if I were a—a patient . . ."

"A patient?" His expression grew quizzical. "Just what do you mean, Sally?"

"You said you were pleased. If a patient is ill her doctor hopes that she will get well. He is pleased when she does. If a woman has a baby a doctor will say, 'I'm so pleased. The baby is doing fine. You don't have to worry about him. I've put him on the scales and he's a bouncing, healthy boy.' "

"Medicine is a sane and wise profession," Sally's husband said. "When I look at my son that is exactly what I would say to the mother of my son. He is healthy and strong. You have pleased me, Sally."

He bent as he spoke and picked Sally's son up. He held the infant in the crook of his arm, smiling down at it.

"A healthy male child," he said. "His hair will come in thick and black. Soon he will speak, will know that I am his father."

He ran his palm over the baby's smooth head, opened its mouth gently with his forefinger and looked inside.

Sally rose on one elbow, her tormented eyes searching his face.

"He's your child, your son!" she sobbed. "A woman has a child and her husband comes and puts his arms around her. He holds her close. If they love each other they are so happy, so very happy, they break down and cry."

"I am too pleased to do anything so fantastic, Sally," he said. "When a child is born no tears should be shed by its parents. I have examined the child and I am pleased with it. Does not that content you?"

"No, it doesn't!" Sally almost shrieked. "Why do you stare at your own son as if you'd never

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seen a baby before? He isn't a mechanical toy. He's our own darling, adorable little baby. *Our child!* How can you be so *inhumanly* calm?"

He frowned, put the baby down.

"There is a time for love-making and a time for parenthood," he said. "Parenthood is a serious responsibility. That is where medicine comes in, surgery. If a child is not perfect there are emergency measures which can be taken to correct the defect."

Sally's mouth went suddenly dry. "Perfect! What do you mean, Jim? Is there something *wrong* with Tommy?"

"I don't think so," her husband said. "His grasp is firm and strong. He has good hearing and his eyesight appears to be all that could be desired. Did you notice how his eyes followed me every moment?"

"I wasn't looking at his eyes!" Sally whispered, her voice tight with alarm. "Why are you trying to frighten me, Jim? If Tommy wasn't a normal, healthy baby do you imagine for one instant they would have placed him in my arms?"

"That is a very sound observation," Sally's husband said. "Truth is truth, but to alarm you at a time like this would be unnecessarily cruel."

"Where does that put you?"

"I simply spoke my mind as the child's father. I had to speak as I did because of my natural concern for the health of our child. Do you want me to stay and talk to you, Sally?"

Sally shook her head. "No, Jim. I won't let you torture me any more."

Sally drew the baby into her arms again and held it tightly. "I'll scream if you stay!" she warned. "I'll become hysterical unless you leave."

"Very well," her husband said. "I'll come back tomorrow."

He bent as he spoke and kissed her on the forehead. His lips were ice cold.

For eight years Sally sat across the table from her husband at breakfast, her eyes fixed upon a nothingness on the green-blue wall at his back. Calm he remained even while eating. The eggs she placed before him he cracked methodically with a knife and consumed behind a tilted newspaper, taking now an assured sip of coffee, now a measured glance at the clock.

The presence of his young son bothered him not at all. Tommy could be quiet or noisy, in trouble at school, or with an *A* for good conduct tucked with his report card in his soiled leather zipper jacket. It was always: "Eat slowly, my son. Never gulp your food. Be sure to take plenty of exercise today. Stay in the sun as much as possible."

Often Sally wanted to shriek: "Be a father to him! A real father!

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Get down on the floor and play with him. Shoot marbles with him, spin one of his tops. Remember the toy locomotive you gave him for Christmas after I got hysterical and screamed at you? Remember the beautiful little train? Get it out of the closet and wreck it accidentally. He'll warm up to you then. He'll be broken-hearted, but he'll feel close to you, then you'll know what it means to have a son!"

Often Sally wanted to fly at him, beat with her fists on his chest. But she never did.

You can't warm a stone by slapping it, Sally. You'd only bruise yourself. A stone is neither cruel nor tender. You've married a man of stone, Sally.

He hasn't missed a day at the office in eight years. She'd never visited the office but he was always there to answer when she phoned. "I'm very busy, Sally. What did you say? You've bought a new hat? I'm sure it will look well on you, Sally. What did you say? Tommy got into a fight with a new boy in the neighborhood? You must take better care of him, Sally."

There are patterns in every marriage. When once the mold has set, a few strange behavior patterns must be accepted as a matter of course.

"I'll drop in at the office tomorrow, darling!" Sally had promised right after the breakfast pattern had become firmly established. The desire to see where her husband worked had been from the start a strong, bright flame in her. But he asked her to wait a while before visiting his office.

A strong will can dampen the brightest flame, and when months passed and he kept saying 'no,' Sally found herself agreeing with her husband's suggestion that the visit be put off indefinitely.

Snuff a candle and it stays snuffed. A marriage pattern once established requires a very special kind of re-kindling. Sally's husband refused to supply the needed spark.

Whenever Sally had an impulse to turn her steps in the direction of the office a voice deep in her mind seemed to whisper: "No sense in it, Sally. Stay away. He's been mean and spiteful about it all these years. Don't give in to him now by going."

Besides, Tommy took up so much of her time. A growing boy was always a problem and Tommy seemed to have a special gift for getting into things because he was so active. And he went through his clothes, wore out his shoes almost faster than she could replace them.

Right now Tommy was playing in the yard. Sally's eyes came to a focus upon him, crouching by a hole in the fence which kindly old Mrs. Wallingford had erected as a protection against the prying inquisitiveness of an eight-year-old

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determined to make life miserable for her.

A thrice-widowed neighbor of seventy without a spiteful hair in her head could put up with a boy who rollicked and yelled perhaps. But peep-hole spying was another matter.

Sally muttered: "Enough of that!" and started for the kitchen door. Just as she reached it the telephone rang.

Sally went quickly to the phone and lifted the receiver. The instant she pressed it to her ear she recognized her husband's voice—or thought she did.

"Sally, come to the office!" came the voice, speaking in a hoarse whisper. "Hurry—or it will be too late! Hurry, Sally!"

Sally turned with a startled gasp, looked out through the kitchen window at the autumn leaves blowing crisp and dry across the lawn. As she looked the scattered leaves whirled into a flurry around Tommy, then lifted and went spinning over the fence and out of sight.

The dread in her heart gave way to a sudden, bleak despair. As she turned from the phone something within her withered, became as dead as the drifting leaves with their dark autumnal mottlings.

She did not even pause to call Tommy in from the yard. She rushed upstairs, then down again, gathering up her hat, gloves and purse, making sure she had enough change to pay for the taxi.

The ride to the office was a nightmare . . . Tall buildings swept past, facades of granite as gray as the leaden skies of mid-winter, beehives of commerce where men and women brushed shoulders without touching hands.

Autumnal leaves blowing, and the gray buildings sweeping past. Despite Tommy, despite everything there was no shining vision to warm Sally from within. A cottage must be lived in to become a home and Sally had never really had a home.

One-night stand! It wasn't an expression she'd have used by choice, but it came unbidden into her mind. If you live for nine years with a man who can't relax and be human, who can't be warm and loving you'll begin eventually to feel you might as well live alone. Each day had been like a lonely sentinel outpost in a desert waste for Sally.

She thought about Tommy . . . Tommy wasn't in the least like his father when he came racing home from school, hair tousled, books dangling from a strap. Tommy would raid the pantry with unthinking zest, invite other boys in to look at the Westerns on TV, and trade black eyes for marbles with a healthy pugnacity.

Up to a point Tommy *was* normal, *was* healthy.

But she had seen mirrored in Tommy's pale blue eyes the same abnormal calmness that was al-

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ways in his father's, and the look of derisive withdrawal which made him seem always to be staring down at her from a height. And it filled her with terror to see that Tommy's mood could change as abruptly and terrifyingly cold . . .

Tommy, her son. Tommy, no longer boisterous and eager, but sitting in a corner with his legs drawn up, a faraway look in his eyes. Tommy seeming to look right through her, into space. Tommy and Jim exchanging silent understanding glances. Tommy roaming through the cottage, staring at his toys with frowning disapproval. Tommy drawing back when she tried to touch him.

Tommy, Tommy, come back to me! How often she had cried out in her heart when that coldness came between them.

Tommy drawing strange figures on the floor with a piece of colored chalk, then erasing them quickly before she could see them, refusing to let her enter his secret child's world.

Tommy picking up the cat and stroking its fur mechanically, while he stared out through the kitchen window at rusty blackbirds on the wing . . .

"This is the address you gave me, lady. Sixty-seven Vine Street," the cab driver was saying.

Sally shivered, remembering her husband's voice on the phone, remembering where she was . . . *"Come to the office, Sally! Hurry, hurry—or it will be too late!"*

Too late for what? Too late to recapture a happiness she had never possessed?

"This is it, lady!" the cab driver insisted. "Do you want me to wait?"

"No," Sally said, fumbling for her change purse. She descended from the taxi, paid the driver and hurried across the pavement to the big office building with its mirroring frontage of plate glass and black onyx tiles.

The firm's name was on the directory board in the lobby, white on black in beautifully embossed lettering. White for hope, and black for despair, mourning . . .

The elevator opened and closed and Sally was whisked up eight stories behind a man in a checkered suit.

"Eighth floor!" Sally whispered, in sudden alarm. The elevator jolted to an abrupt halt and the operator swung about to glare at her.

"You should have told me when you got on, Miss!" he complained.

"Sorry," Sally muttered, stumbling out into the corridor. How horrible it must be to go to business every day, she thought wildly. To sit in an office, to thumb through papers, to bark orders, to be a machine.

Sally stood very still for an instant, startled, feeling her sanity threatened by the very absurdity of the thought. People who

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worked in offices could turn for escape to a cottage in the sunset's glow, when they were set free by the moving hands of a clock. There could be a fierce joy at the thought of deliverance, at the prospect of going home at five o'clock.

But for Sally was the brightness, the deliverance withheld. The corridor was wide and deserted and the black tiles with their gold borders seemed to converge upon her, hemming her into a cool magnificence as structurally somber as the architectural embellishments of a costly mausoleum.

She found the office with her surface mind, working at cross-purposes with the confusion and swiftly mounting dread which made her footsteps falter, her mouth go dry.

Steady, Sally! Here's the office, here's the door. Turn the knob and get it over with . . .

Sally opened the door and stepped into a small, deserted reception room. Beyond the reception desk was a gate, and beyond the gate a large central office branched off into several smaller offices.

Sally paused only an instant. It seemed quite natural to her that a business office should be deserted so late in the afternoon.

She crossed the reception room to the gate, passed through it, utter desperation giving her courage.

Something within her whispered that she had only to walk across the central office, open the first door she came to to find her husband . . .

The first door combined privacy with easy accessibility. The instant she opened the door she knew that she had been right to trust her instincts. This was his office . . .

He was sitting at a desk by the window, a patch of sunset sky visible over his right shoulder. His elbows rested on the desk and his hands were tightly locked as if he had just stopped wringing them.

He was looking straight at her, his eyes wide and staring.

"Jim!" Sally breathed. "Jim, what's wrong?"

He did not answer, did not move or attempt to greet her in any way. There was no color at all in his face. His lips were parted, his white teeth gleamed. And he was more stiffly controlled than usual—a control so intense that for once Sally felt more alarm than bitterness.

There was a rising terror in her now. And a slowly dawning horror. The sunlight streamed in, gleaming redly on his hair, his shoulders. He seemed to be the center of a flaming red ball . . .

He sent for you, Sally. Why doesn't he get up and speak to you, if only to pour salt on the wounds you've borne for eight long years?

Poor Sally! You wanted a

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strong, protective, old-fashioned husband. What have you got instead?

Sally went up to the desk and looked steadily into eyes so calm and blank that they seemed like the eyes of a child lost in some dreamy wonderland barred forever to adult understanding.

For an instant her terror ebbed and she felt almost reassured. Then she made the mistake of bending more closely above him, brushing his right elbow with her sleeve.

That single light woman's touch unsettled him. He started to fall, sideways and very fast. Topple a dead weight and it crashes with a swiftness no opposing force can counter-balance.

It did Sally no good to clutch frantically at his arm as he fell, to tug and jerk at the slackening ...ds of his suit. The heaviness of ...escending bulk dragged him ...nd away from her, the ...ertia of lifeless flesh.

... thudded to the floor and rolled over on his back, seeming to shrink as Sally widened her eyes upon him. He lay in a grotesque sprawl at her feet, his jaw hanging open on the gaping black orifice of his mouth . . .

Sally might have screamed and gone right on screaming—if she had been a different kind of woman. On seeing her husband lying dead her impulse might have been to throw herself down beside him, give way to her grief in a wild fit of sobbing.

But where there was no grief there could be no sobbing . . .

One thing only she did before she left. She unloosed the collar of the unmoving form on the floor and looked for the small brown mole she did not really expect to find. The mole she knew to be on her husband's shoulder, high up on the left side.

She had noticed things that made her doubt her sanity; she needed to see the little black mole to reassure her . . .

She had noticed the difference in the hair-line, the strange slant of the eyebrows, the crinkly texture of the skin where it should have been smooth . . .

Something was wrong . . . horribly, weirdly wrong . . .

Even the hands of the sprawled form seemed larger and hairier than the hands of her husband. Nevertheless it was important to be sure . . .

The absence of the mole clinched it.

Sally crouched beside the body, carefully readjusting the collar. Then she got up and walked out of the office.

Some homecomings are joyful, others cruel. Sitting in the taxi, clenching and unclenching her hands, Sally had no plan that could be called a plan, no hope that was more than a dim flickering in a vast wasteland, bleak and unexplored.

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But it was strange how one light burning brightly in a cottage window could make even a wasteland seem small, could shrink and diminish it until it became no more than a patch of darkness that anyone with courage might cross.

The light was in Tommy's room and there was a whispering behind the door. Sally could hear the whispering as she tiptoed upstairs, could see the light streaming out into the hall.

She paused for an instant at the head of the stairs, listening. There were two voices in the room, and they were talking back and forth.

Sally tiptoed down the hall, stood with wildly beating heart just outside the door.

"She knows now, Tommy," the deepest of the two voices said. "We are very close, your mother and I. She knows now that I sent her to the office to find my 'stand in.' Oh, it's an amusing term, Tommy—an Earth term we'd hardly use on Mars. But it's a term your mother would understand."

A pause, then the voice went on, "You see, my son, it has taken me eight years to repair the ship. And in eight years a man can wither up and die by inches if he does not have a growing son to go adventuring with him in the end."

"Adventuring, father?"

"You have read a good many Earth books, my son, written especially for boys. *Treasure Island, Robinson Crusoe, Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea.* What paltry books they are! But in them there is a little of the fire, a little of the glow of *our* world."

"No, father. I started them but I threw them away for I did not like them."

"As you and I must throw away all Earth things, my son. I tried to be kind to your mother, to be a good husband as husbands go on Earth. But how could I feel proud and strong and reckless by her side? How could I share her paltry joys and sorrows, chirp with delight as a sparrow might chirp hopping about in the grass? Can an eagle pretend to be a sparrow? Can the thunder muffle its voice when two white-crested clouds collide in the shining depths of the night sky?"

"You tried, father. You did your best."

"Yes, my son, I did try, if I had attempted to feign tions I did not feel you would have seen through tense. She would then have turned from me completely. Without her I could not have had you, my son."

"And now, father, what will we do?"

"Now the ship has been repaired and is waiting for us. Every day for eight years I went to the hill and worked on the ship. It was badly wrecked, my son, but now my patience has been re-

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warded, and every damaged astronavigation instrument has been replaced."

"You never went to the office, father? You never went at all?"

"No, my son. My stand-in worked at the office in my place. I instilled in your mother's mind an intense dislike and fear of the office to keep her from ever coming face to face with the stand-in. She might have noticed the difference. But I had to have a stand-in, as a safeguard. Your mother *might* have gone to the office despite the mental block."

"She's gone now, father. Why did you send for her?"

"To avoid what she would call a scene, my son. That I could not endure. I had the stand-in summon her on the office telephone, then I withdrew all vitality from it. She will find it quite lifeless. But it does not matter now. When she returns we will be gone."

"Was constructing the stand-in difficult, father?"

"Not for me, my son. On Mars we have many androids, each constructed to perform a specific task. Some are ingenious beyond belief—or would seem so to Earthmen."

There was a pause, then the weaker of the two voices said, "I will miss my mother. She tried to make me happy. She tried very hard."

"You must be brave and strong, my son. We are eagles, you and I. Your mother is a sparrow, gentle and dun-colored. I shall always remember her with tenderness. You want to go with me, don't you?"

"Yes, father. Oh, yes!"

"Then come, my son. We must hurry. Your mother will be returning any minute now."

Sally stood motionless, listening to the voices like a spectator sitting before a television screen. A spectator can see as well as hear, and Sally could visualize her son's pale, eager face so clearly there was no need for her to move forward into the room.

She could not move. And nothing on Earth could have wrenched a tortured cry from her. Grief and shock may paralyze the mind and will, but Sally's will was not paralyzed.

It was as if the thread of her life had been cut, with only one light left burning. Tommy was that light. He would never change. He would go from her forever. But he would always be her son.

The door of Tommy's room opened and Tommy and his father came out into the hall. Sally stepped back into shadows and watched them walk quickly down the hall to the stairs, their voices low, hushed. She heard them descend the stairs, their footsteps dwindle, die away into silence . . .

You'll see a light, Sally, a great glow lighting up the sky. The ship must be very beautiful. For eight years he labored over it, restoring it with all the shining gifts of skill

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and feeling at his command. He was calm toward you, but not toward the ship, Sally—the ship which will take him back to Mars!

How is it on Mars, she wondered. My son, Tommy, will become a strong, proud adventurer daring the farthest planet of the farthest star?

You can't stop a boy from adventuring. Surprise him at his books and you'll see tropical seas in his eyes, a pearly nautilus, Hong Kong and Valparaiso resplendent in the dawn.

There is no strength quite like the strength of a mother, Sally. Endure it, be brave . . .

Sally was at the window when it came. A dazzling burst of radiance, starting from the horizon's rim and spreading across the entire sky. It lit up the cottage and flickered over the lawn, turning rooftops to molten gold and gilding the long line of rolling hills which hemmed in the town.

Brighter it grew and brighter, gilding for a moment even Sally's bowed head and her image mirrored on the pane. Then, abruptly, it was gone . . .

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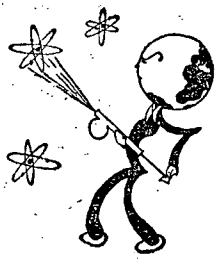

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rex ex machina

by . . . Frederic Max

One final lesson—a dying man's last letter to his only son that completes the young man's education.

MY DEAR SON:—

The doctors have left and I am told that in a few hours I shall die. In my lifetime the world has progressed from the chaotic turmoil of the early Atomic era to the peacefulness and tranquility of our present age, and I die content.

For ten years I have instructed you in all that you will need for the future. One final lesson remains to be taught.

On the wall of my bedchamber hangs a citation "from a grateful government for services too secret to be herein set forth." In past years you have asked me repeatedly about this citation, but each time I have taken pains to avoid a direct answer. Now it is proper that you should know.

Forty years ago I was an obscure Army captain stationed at the Armed Forces Language School in Monterey, California. I had at that time just completed a tour of duty in Korea, a minor skirmish of that era, and despite an excellent reputation for resourcefulness, I had drawn Monterey as my next assignment. An aptitude for foreign languages had led to an instructorship in the Russian department with ad-

The domination of the minds of tractable Man is not new. Many men have dreamed of it. Certainly some of them have tried. This man succeeded.

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ditional duties instructing in the Slavic tongues.

My life was pleasant and uneventful, and it was with mixed emotions that I received orders to report to Washington for a new duty assignment. The chain of events which precipitated those orders were to change the world . . .

For while you and I were playing on the lawn of our Monterey home, an unknown Hungarian physicist working under Russian supervision had made a startling discovery. Within a matter of days alarming rumors of his work reached Washington. Our embassies in Moscow and Belgrade reported furious activity in the field of psychic research and large-scale experiments in mass hypnosis. Four of us were selected to investigate the rumors. Before we could commence our undertaking, word reached Washington that the rumors were now actualities. A device capable of the mass hypnosis of great segments of the world's population was rapidly reaching perfection.

After three months of intensive grooming in the fields of physics and psychology, we four agents set out individually with orders to track down and destroy both the scientist and his machine. I never saw the other three again . . .

During the three months of schooling, other members of our vast intelligence organization had been engaged in laying the groundwork for our efforts. In December 1955, I slipped into Russia and took the place of a government official who felt that Western civilization offered greater reimbursement than Soviet Communism.

I entered into my new role with trepidation, but my fears were unfounded. Thanks to a remarkable resemblance (which was the original reason for my selection) and also due to a most thorough briefing, I found myself making the substitution with ease. I pride myself on the fact that by diligent application I was able to increase my worth to the Russian government to the extent that I was shortly able to secure my transfer to the psychological warfare section of the secret police. From there it was a simple procedure to have myself assigned to what was known as "Project Parchak."

The device was in its final stage of development; only the problem of increasing its effective range remained to be solved. Three weeks after my assignment to the project, its successful conclusion was accomplished.

In June 1956, the Russian government ordered me to a small house on the outskirts of Braila, Hungary, where I was to attend a private showing of the device. By design, I arrived one day early and made my way to the laboratory immediately. Dr.

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Michael Parchak, the inventor, stood facing me as I entered. On a table between us lay a small complicated mechanism resembling a radio transmitter. But it was infinitely more than that. The device was a thought generator capable of hypnotizing every thinking creature on the face of the earth. The power of infinite goodness or evil which the machine embodied was terrifying to consider.

I listened to Parchak's boasting with revulsion. Although he had the ability to work for the ultimate good of mankind, this creature intended, instead, to use his newly-found power for selfish aggrandizement.

I drew him out, let him explain the inner workings of his device—and killed him. My orders were to destroy the machine. I disobeyed them. Utilizing the machine to make good my escape, I left Hungary and returned to the United States. The citation which you have seen was only one of the many honors which were bestowed upon me.

A few weeks later I resigned my commission and retired to a country hideaway to experiment further with the device I was supposed to have destroyed. The peace and tranquility in which we of the earth now live marked the successful culmination of my experiments.

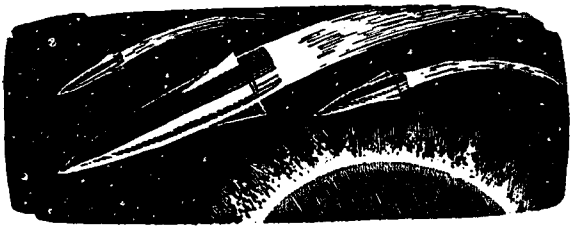
You will find the machine walled up in the North alcove of my bedchamber.

Your education is now complete my son, use it well. Be kind to our slave peoples, the world is yours.

Your affectionate father,

FRANCIS I

EMPEROR OF THE EARTH



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survey team

by . . . Philip K. Dick

A brave new world or was it the long way home—for these men.

HALLOWAY CAME up through six miles of ash to see how the rocket looked in landing. He emerged from the lead-shielded bore and joined Young, crouching down with a small knot of surface troops.

The surface of the planet was dark and silent. The air stung his nose. It smelled foul. Halloway shivered uneasily. "Where the hell are we?"

A soldier pointed into the blackness. "The mountains are over there. See them? The Rockies, and this is Colorado."

Colorado . . . The old name awakened vague emotion in Halloway. He fingered his blast rifle. "When will it get here?" he asked. Far off, against the horizon, he could see the Enemy's green and yellow signal flares. And an occasional flash of fission white.

"Any time now. It's mechanically controlled all the way, piloted by robot. When it comes it really comes."

An Enemy mine burst a few dozen miles away. For a brief instant the landscape was outlined in jagged lightning. Halloway and the troops dropped to

It's been in the last few years that Philip K. Dick has made a fine name for himself in science fiction. He is constantly turning out freshly individual stories. In this new yarn his magic, trenchant touch has created a situation, glowing with the high excitement of the galactic unknown.

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the ground automatically. He caught the dead burned smell of the surface of Earth as it was now, thirty years after the war began.

It was a lot different from the way he remembered it when he was a kid in California. He could remember the valley country, grape orchards and walnuts and lemons. Smudge pots under the orange trees. Green mountains and sky the color of a woman's eyes. And the fresh smell of the soil . . .

That was all gone now. Nothing remained but gray ash pulverized with the white stones of buildings. Once a city had been in this spot. He could see the yawning cavities of cellars, filled now with slag, dried rivers of rust that had once been buildings. Rubble strewn everywhere, aimlessly . . .

The mine flare faded out and the blackness settled back. They got cautiously to their feet. "Quite a sight," a soldier murmured.

"It was a lot different before," Halloway said.

"Was it? I was born undersurface."

"In those days we grew our food right in the ground, on the surface. In the soil. Not in underground tanks. We—"

Halloway broke off. A great rushing sound filled the air suddenly, cutting off his words. An immense shape roared past them in the blackness, struck someplace close, and shaking the earth.

"The rocket!" a soldier shouted. They all began running, Halloway lumbering awkwardly along.

"Good news, I hope," Young said, close by him.

"I hope, too," Halloway gasped. "Mars is our last chance. If this doesn't work we're finished. The report on Venus was negative; nothing there but lava and steam."

Later they examined the rocket from Mars.

"It'll do," Young murmured.

"You're sure?" Director Davidson asked tensely. "Once we get there we can't come running back."

"We're sure." Halloway tossed the spools across the desk to Davidson. "Examine them yourself. The air on Mars will be thin, and dry. The gravity is much weaker than ours. But we'll be able to live there, which is more than you can say for this God-forsaken Earth."

Davidson picked up the spools. The unblinking recessed lights gleamed down on the metal desk, the metal walls and floor of the office. Hidden machinery wheezed in the walls, maintaining the air and temperature. "I'll have to rely on you experts, of course. If some vital factor is not taken into account—"

"Naturally, it's a gamble,"

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Young said. "We can't be sure of all factors at this distance." He tapped the spools. "Mechanical samples and photos. Robots creeping around, doing the best they can. We're lucky to have *anything* to go on."

"There's no radiation at least," Halloway said. "We can count on that. But Mars will be dry and dusty and cold. It's a long way out. Weak sun. Deserts and wrinkled hills."

"Mars is old," Young agreed. "It was cooled a long time ago. Look at it this way: We have eight planets, excluding Earth. Pluto to Jupiter is *out*. No chance of survival there. Mercury is nothing but liquid metal. Venus is still volcano and steam—pre-Cambrian. That's seven of the eight. Mars is the only possibility *a priori*."

"In other words," Davidson said slowly, "Mars *has* to be okay because there's nothing else for us to try."

"We could stay here. Live on here in the undersurface systems like gophers."

"We could not last more than another year. You've seen the recent psych graphs."

They had. The tension index was up. Men weren't made to live in metal tunnels, living on tank-grown food, working and sleeping and dying without seeing the sun.

It was the children they were really thinking about. Kids that had never been up to the surface. Wan-faced pseudo mutants with eyes like blind fish. A generation born in the subterranean world. The tension index was up because men were seeing their children alter and meld in with a world of tunnels and slimy darkness and dripping luminous rocks.

"Then it's agreed?" Young said.

Davidson searched the faces of the two technicians. "Maybe we could reclaim the surface, revive Earth again, renew its soil. It hasn't really gone that far, has it?"

"No chance," Young said flatly. "Even if we could work an arrangement with the Enemy there'll be particles in suspension for another fifty years. Earth will be too hot for life the rest of this century. *And we can't wait.*"

"All right," Davidson said. "I'll authorize the survey team. We'll risk that, at least. You want to go? Be the first humans to land on Mars?"

"You bet," Halloway said grimly. "It's in our contract that I go."

The red globe that was Mars grew steadily larger. In the control room Young and van Ecker, the navigator, watched it intently.

"We'll have to bail," van Ecker said. "No chance of landing at this velocity."

Young was nervous. "That's all right for us, but how about the first load of settlers? We can't

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expect women and children to jump."

"By then we'll know more." Van Ecker nodded and Captain Mason sounded the emergency alarm. Throughout the ship relay bells clanged ominously. The ship throbbed with scampering feet as crew members grabbed their jump-suits and hurried to the hatches.

"Mars," Captain Mason murmured, still at the viewscreen. "Not like Luna. This is the real thing."

Young and Halloway moved toward the hatch. "We better get going."

Mars was swelling rapidly. An ugly bleak globe, dull red. Halloway fitted on his jump helmet. Van Ecker came behind him.

Mason remained in the control cabin. "I'll follow," he said, "after the crew's out."

The hatch slid back and they moved out onto the jump shelf. The crew were already beginning to leap.

"Too bad to waste a ship," Young said.

"Can't be helped." Van Ecker clamped his helmet on and jumped. His brake-units sent him spinning upward, rising like a balloon into the blackness above them. Young and Halloway followed. Below them the ship plunged on, downward toward the surface of Mars. In the sky tiny luminous dots drifted—the crew members.

"I've been thinking," Halloway said into his helmet speaker.

"What about?" Young's voice came in his earphones.

"Davidson was talking about overlooking some vital factor. There is one we haven't considered."

"What's that?"

"The Martians."

"Good God!" van Ecker chimed in. Halloway could see him drifting off to his right, settling slowly toward the planet below. "You think there *are* Martians?"

"It's possible. Mars will sustain life. If we can live there other complex forms could exist, too."

"We'll know soon enough," Young said.

Van Ecker laughed. "Maybe they trapped one of our robot rockets. Maybe they're expecting us."

Halloway was silent. It was too close to be funny. The red planet was growing rapidly. He could see white spots at the poles. A few hazy blue-green ribbons that had once been called *canals*. Was there a civilization down there, an organized culture waiting for them, as they drifted slowly down? He groped at his pack until his fingers closed over the butt of his pistol.

"Better get your guns out," he said.

"If there's a Martian defense system waiting for us we won't

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have a chance," Young said. "Mars cooled millions of years ahead of Earth. It's a cinch they'll be so advanced we won't even be—"

"Too late now," Mason's voice came faintly. "You experts should have thought of that before."

"Where are you?" Halloway demanded.

"Drifting below you. The ship is empty. Should strike any moment. I got all the equipment out, attached it to automatic jump units."

A faint flash of light exploded briefly below, winked out. The ship, striking the surface . . .

"I'm almost down," Mason said nervously. "I'll be the first . . ."

Mars had ceased to be a globe. Now it was a great red dish, a vast plain of dull rust spread out beneath them. They fell slowly, silently, toward it. Mountains became visible. Narrow trickles of water that were rivers. A vague checker-board pattern that might have been fields and pastures . . .

Halloway gripped his pistol tightly. His brake-units shrieked as the air thickened. He was almost down. A muffled *crunch* sounded abruptly in his earphones.

"Mason!" Young shouted.

"I'm down," Mason's voice came faintly.

"You all right?"

"Knocked the wind out of me. But I'm all right."

"How does it look?" Halloway demanded.

For a moment there was silence. Then: "Good God!" Mason gasped. "A *city!*"

"A city?" Young yelled. "What kind? What's it like?"

"Can you see them?" van Ecker shouted. "What are they like? Are there a lot of them?"

They could hear Mason breathing. His breath rasped hoarsely in their phones. "No," he gasped at last. "No sign of life. No activity. The city is—it looks deserted."

"Deserted?"

"Ruins. Nothing but ruins. Miles of wrecked columns and walls and rusting scaffolding."

"Thank God," Young breathed. "They must have died out. We're safe. They must have evolved and finished their cycle a long time ago."

"Did they leave us anything?" Fear clutched at Halloway. "Is there anything left for *us?*" He clawed wildly at his brake-units, struggling frantically to hurry his descent. "Is it all gone?"

"You think they used up everything?" Young said. "You think they exhausted all the—"

"I can't tell," Mason's weak voice came, tinged with uneasiness. "It looks bad. Big pits. Mining pits. I can't tell, but it looks bad . . ."

Halloway struggled desperately with his brake-units.

The planet was a shambles.

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"Good God," Young mumbled. He sat down on a broken column and wiped his face. "Not a damn thing left. Nothing."

Around them the crew were setting up huts and emergency defense units. The communications team was assembling a battery-driven transmitter. A bore team was drilling for water. Other teams were scouting around, looking for food.

"There won't be any signs of life," Halloway said. He waved at the endless expanse of debris and rust. "They're gone, finished a long time ago."

"I don't understand," Mason muttered. "How could they wreck a whole planet?"

"We wrecked Earth in thirty years."

"Not this way. They've *used* Mars up. Used up everything. Nothing left. Nothing at all. It's one vast scrap-heap."

Shakily Halloway tried to light a cigarette. The match burned feebly, then sputtered out. He felt light and dopey. His heart throbbed heavily. The distant sun beat down, pale and small. Mars was cold, a lonely dead world.

Halloway said, "They must have had a hell of a time, watching their cities rot away. No water or minerals, finally no soil." He picked up a handful of dry sand, let it trickle through his fingers.

"Transmitter working," a crew member said.

Mason got to his feet and lumbered awkwardly over to the transmitter. "I'll tell Davidson what we've found." He bent over the microphone.

Young looked across at Halloway. "Well, I guess we're stuck. How long will our supplies carry us?"

"Couple of months."

"And then—" Young snapped his fingers. "Like the Martians." He squinted at the long corroded wall of a ruined house. "I wonder what they were like."

"A semantics team is probing the ruins. Maybe they'll turn up something."

Beyond the ruined city stretched out what had once been an industrial area. Fields of twisted installations, towers and pipes and machinery. Sand-covered and partly rusted. The surface of the land was pocked with great gaping sores. Yawning pits where scoops had once dredged. Entrances of underground mines. Mars was honeycombed. Termite-ridden. A whole race had burrowed and dug in trying to stay alive. The Martians had sucked Mars dry, then fled it.

"A graveyard," Young said. "Well, they got what they deserved."

"You blame them? What should they have done? Perished a few thousand years sooner and

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left their planet in better shape?"

"They could have left us *something,*" Young said stubbornly. "Maybe we can dig up their bones and boil them. I'd like to get my hands on one of them long enough to—"

A pair of crewmen came hurrying across the sand. "Look at these!" They carried armloads of metal tubes, glittering cylinders heaped up in piles. "Look what we found buried!"

Halloway roused himself. "What is it?"

"Records. Written documents. Get these to the semantics team!" Carmichael spilled his armload at Halloway's feet. "And this isn't all. We found something else—installations."

"Installations? What kind?"

"Rocket launchers. Old towers, rusty as hell. There are fields of them on the other side of the town." Carmichael wiped perspiration from his red face. "They didn't die, Halloway. They took off. They used up this place, then left."

Doctor Judde and Young pored over the gleaming tubes. "It's coming," Judde murmured, absorbed in the shifting pattern undulating across the scanner.

"Can you make anything out?" Halloway asked tensely.

"They left, all right. Took off. The whole lot of them."

Young turned to Halloway. "What do you think of that? So they didn't die out."

"Can you tell where they went?"

Judde shook his head. "Some planet their scout ships located. Ideal climate and temperature." He pushed the scanner aside. "In their last period the whole Martian civilization was oriented around this escape planet. Big project, moving a society lock, stock and barrel. It took them three or four hundred years to get everything of value off Mars and on its way to the other planet."

"How did the operation come out?"

"Not so good. The planet was beautiful. But they had to adapt. Apparently they didn't anticipate all the problems arising from colonization on a strange planet." Judde indicated a cylinder. "The colonies deteriorated rapidly. Couldn't keep the traditions and techniques going. The society broke apart. Then came war, barbarism."

"Then their migration was a failure." Halloway pondered. "Maybe it can't be done. Maybe it's impossible."

"Not a failure," Judde corrected. "They lived, at least. This place was no good any more. Better to live as savages on a strange world than stay here and die. So they say, on these cylinders."

"Come along," Young said to Halloway. The two men stepped outside the semantics hut. It was night. The sky was littered with

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glowing stars. The two moons had risen. They glimmered coldly, two dead eyes in the chilly sky.

"This place won't do," Young stated. "We can't migrate here. That's settled."

Halloway eyed him. "What's on your mind?"

"This was the last of the nine planets. We tested every one of them." Young's face was alive with emotion. "None of them will support life. All of them are lethal or useless, like this rubbish heap. The whole damn solar system is out."

"So?"

"We'll have to leave the solar system."

"And go where? *How?*"

Young pointed toward the Martian ruins, to the city and the rusted, bent rows of towers. "Where *they* went. They found a place to go. An untouched world outside the solar system. And they developed some kind of outer-space drive to get them there."

"You mean—"

"Follow them. This solar system is dead. But outside, someplace in some other system, they found an escape world. And they were able to get there."

"We'd have to fight with them if we land on their planet. They won't want to share it."

Young spat angrily on the sand. "Their colonies deteriorated. Remember? Broke down into barbarism. We can handle them. We've got everything in the way of war weapons—weapons that can wipe a planet clean."

"We don't want to do that."

"What *do* we want to do? Tell Davidson we're stuck on Terra? Let the human race turn into underground moles? Blind crawling *things* . . ."

"If we follow the Martians we'll be competing for their world. They found it; the damn thing belongs to them, not us. And maybe we can't work out their drive. Maybe the schematics are lost."

Judde emerged from the semantics hut. "I've some more information. The whole story is here. Details on the escape planet. Fauna and flora. Studies of its gravity, air density, mineral possessions, soil layer, climate, temperature—everything."

"How about their drive?"

"Breakdown on that, too. Everything." Judde was shaking with excitement. "I have an idea. Let's get the designs team on these drive schematics and see if they can duplicate it. If they can, we could follow the Martians. We could sort of *share* their planet with them."

"See?" Young said to Halloway. "Davidson will say the same thing. It's obvious."

Halloway turned and walked off.

"What's wrong with him?" Judde asked.

"Nothing. He'll get over it."

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Young scratched out a quick message on a piece of paper. "Have this transmitted to Davidson back on Terra."

Judde peered at the message. He whistled. "You're telling him about the Martian migration. And about the escape planet."

"We want to get started. It'll take a long time to get things under way."

"Will Halloway come around?"

"He'll come around," Young said. "Don't worry about him."

Halloway gazed up at the towers. The leaning, sagging towers from which the Martian transports had been launched thousands of years before.

Nothing stirred. No sign of life. The whole dried-up planet was dead.

Halloway wandered among the towers. The beam from his helmet cut a white path in front of him. Ruins, heaps of rusting metal. Bales of wire and building material. Parts of uncompleted equipment. Half-buried construction sections sticking up from the sand.

He came to a raised platform and mounted the ladder cautiously. He found himself in an observation mount, surrounded by the remains of dials and meters. A telescopic sight stuck up, rusted in place, frozen tight.

"Hey," a voice came from below. "Who's up there?"

"Halloway."

"God, you scared me." Carmichael slid his blast rifle away and climbed the ladder. "What you doing?"

"Looking around."

Carmichael appeared beside him, puffing and red-faced. "Interesting, these towers. This was an automatic sighting station. Fixed the take-off for supply transports. The population was already gone." Carmichael slapped at the ruined control board. "These supply ships continued to take-off, loaded by machines and dispatched by machines, after all the Martians were gone."

"Lucky for them they had a place to go."

"Sure was. The minerals team says there's not a damn thing left here. Nothing but dead sand and rock and debris. Even the water's no good. They took everything of value."

"Judde says their escape world is pretty nice."

"Virgin." Carmichael smacked his fat lips. "Never touched. Trees and meadows and blue oceans. He showed me a scanner translation of a cylinder."

"Too bad we don't have a place like that to go. A virgin world for ourselves."

Carmichael was bent over the telescope. "This here sighted for them. When the escape planet swam into view a relay delivered a trigger charge to the control tower. The tower launched the ships. When the ships were gone

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a new flock came up into position." Carmichael began to polish the encrusted lenses of the telescope, wiping the accumulated rust and debris away. "Maybe we'll see their planet."

In the ancient lenses a vague luminous globe was swimming. Halloway could make it out, obscured by the filth of centuries, hidden behind a curtain of metallic particles and dirt.

Carmichael was down on his hands and knees, working with the focus machanism. "See anything?" he demanded.

Halloway nodded. "Yeah."

Carmichael pushed him away. "Let me look." He squinted into the lens. "Aw, for God's sake!"

"What's wrong? Can't you see it?"

"I see it," Carmichael said, getting down on his hands and knees again. "The thing must have slipped. Or the time shift is too great. But this is supposed to adjust automatically. Of course, the gear box has been frozen for—"

"What's wrong?" Halloway demanded.

"That's Earth. Don't you recognize it?"

"Earth!"

Carmichael sneered with disgust. "This fool thing must be busted. I wanted to get a look at their dream planet. That's just old Terra, where we came from. All my work trying to fix this wreck up, and what do we see?"

"Earth!" Halloway murmured. He had just finished telling Young about the telescope.

"I can't believe it," Young said. "But the description fitted Earth thousands of years ago . . ."

"How long ago did they take off?" Halloway asked.

"About six hundred thousand years ago," Judde said.

"And their colonies descended into barbarism on the new planet."

The four men were silent. They looked at each other, tight-lipped.

"We've destroyed two worlds," Halloway said at last. "Not one. Mars first. We finished up here, then we moved to Terra. And we destroyed Terra as systematically as we did Mars."

"A closed circle," Mason said. "We're back where we started. Back to reap the crop our ancestors sowed. They left Mars this way. Useless. And now we're back here poking around the ruins like ghouls."

"Shut up," Young snapped. He paced angrily back and forth. "I can't believe it."

"We're Martians. Descendants of the original stock that left here. We're back from the colonies. Back home." Mason's voice rose hysterically. "We're home again, where we belong!"

Judde pushed aside the scanner and got to his feet. "No doubt about it. I checked their analysis with our own archeological

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records. It fits. Their escape world was Terra, six hundred thousand years ago."

"What'll we tell Davidson?" Mason demanded. He giggled wildly. "We've found a perfect place. A world untouched by human hands. Still in the original cellophane wrapper."

Halloway moved to the door of the hut, stood gazing silently out. Judde joined him. "This is catastrophic. We're really stuck. What the hell are you looking at?"

Above them, the cold sky glittered. In the bleak light the barren plains of Mars stretched out, mile after mile of empty, wasted ruin.

"At that," Halloway said. "You know what it reminds me of?"

"A picnic site."

"Broken bottles and tin cans and wadded up plates. After the picnickers have left. Only, the picnickers are back. They're back—and they have to live in the mess they made."

"What'll we tell Davidson?" Mason demanded.

"I've already called him," Young said wearily. "I told him there was a planet, out of the system. Someplace we could go. The Martians had a drive."

"A drive." Judde pondered. "Those towers." His lips twisted. "Maybe they did have an outer-space drive. Maybe it's worth going on with the translation."

They looked at each other.

"Tell Davidson we're going on," Halloway ordered. "We'll keep on until we find it. We're not staying on this God-forsaken junkyard." His gray eyes glowed. "We'll find it, yet. A virgin world. A world that's unspoiled."

"Unspoiled," Young echoed. "Nobody there ahead of us."

"We'll be the first," Judde muttered avidly.

"It's wrong!" Mason shouted. "Two are enough! Let's not destroy a third world!"

Nobody listened to him. Judde and Young and Halloway gazed up, faces eager, hands clenching and unclenching. As if they were already there. As if they were already holding onto the new world, clutching it with all their strength. Tearing it apart, atom by atom . . .

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made in tanganyika

by . . . Carl Jacobi

See what happens when two conchologists get caught in a necromantic nightmare of their own.

ON HIS FORTIETH birthday Martin Sutter decided life was too short to continue in the rut that had been his existence for more than twenty years. He withdrew his savings from the Explosion City Third Federal Bank, stopped in a display room and informed a somewhat surprised clerk he was taking the electric runabout with the blue bonnet. The ground-car, complete with extras, retailed for a tidy three thousand credits.

To accustom himself to the car's controls Sutter chose Highway 56 for a driving lesson. He tooled the electric runabout up into the third level, purred out across state at an effortless two hundred, then descended via a cloverleaf to ground tier and entered a maze of subsidiary roads that led through the summer countryside.

In this manner he drove the major part of the afternoon. Travel was light, away from the elevated lanes and he enjoyed himself.

At four o'clock he began to look for a convenient place to turn around. It was then that he sighted the roadside stand ahead. Above it a freshly painted sign read: TV

Come, enjoy a Carl Jacobi field day—backed by his vivid, irresistible imagination and his keen sense of fun. Or was it so funny for Martin Sutter? For, unlike him, you'll surely be cautious the next time you turn on your TV set—especially if you notice it was made in Tanganyika.

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SETS. LATEST MODELS. SPECIAL WHOLESALE PRICES!

Sutter smiled. Whoever heard of selling television sets on a country highway? It was like—why, it was like selling eggs in the lobby of the Hotel International! Then it occurred to him that his own TV set had not been in good working order for more than a year. The olfactory control had jammed last week while he was watching a Sumatran tribal ceremony, inland from Soerabaya, and he had been unable to smell the backdrop frangipangi blossoms. It was time he bought a new set . . .

Sutter touched a stud and the electric runabout coasted to a halt. As he climbed out of the car and walked across the highway toward the stand, he thought for a moment there was something wrong with his contact lenses or perhaps his eyes.

The stand and the sign above it appeared to waver uncertainly, to become disjointed as though viewed through uneven glass. But the effect passed and Sutter approached the stand and nodded to the individual tilted back in a chair beside it.

He was a rawboned man with a thatch of thick black hair and small watery eyes. He was dressed, oddly enough, in a pair of tight-fitting trousers of white lawn, a flaming red tunic and a yellow cummerbund.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Can I show you something in a new TV?"

"Where are they?" asked Sutter, surveying the empty stand.

"Out back," replied the man. "Just a minute and I'll show you."

He rose lazily from his chair and led the way around to the rear of the stand. Sutter could have sworn he had seen an apple orchard behind the structure as he rode up, but he must have been mistaken for now he saw a low-roofed aluminum-walled building there, huge doors open on one side. It looked, he thought, somewhat like a hangar . . .

Two hours later Sutter arrived back at his home in town. He parked the car, went around to the rear compartment, lifted out a large packing case and carried it to his sitting room. There, with the aid of hammer and crowbar, he stripped away the protective boards and then trundled the cabinet to an unoccupied corner.

It was certainly a unique TV set. A very new model, the salesman had said. The cabinet was shaped like a delta with a cube surmounted on the pointed end of the triangle. The cube held the screen, the triangle, the controls. Finished in a subdued ochre color, the set captured the light of the dying day that filtered through the bay window and gleamed with a soft radiance.

Sutter looked at the control panel and his smile of satisfaction faded somewhat. It looked a little complicated . . .

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Instead of the usual knobs there were five small spoked wheels, each closely calibrated in lavender with resilient studs that seemed to be made of plush. Below this was a small dial with the legend *Element of Probability* lettered on it.

Sutter was about to switch on the set when the door buzzer sounded. He crossed to the door and pulled it open.

A tall gangly man stood there. Swarthy, face partially covered by a neatly trimmed beard, he looked the conventional picture of a story-book villain. He wore a broad-brimmed hat and an underslung pipe was clamped in his teeth. He said in a deep booming voice, "Are you Mr. Martin Sutter?"

"Yes, I am. What can I do for you?"

The man said his name was Lucien Travail. He explained that he had been looking for a room and that Mrs. Conworth, the landlady, had informed him she had no vacancies but suggested that her roomer, Mr. Sutter, might be interested in a roommate.

"Of course I realize you don't know me but I believe our strangeness will be offset by our mutual hobby."

Sutter was silent, waiting for him to continue.

"I collect shells," Travail said.

For thirty years Sutter had pursued a hobby which had begun in his boyhood days during summer vacations at the seashore—the collecting of exoskeletons of mollusks and crustaceans. Long ago his assortment of cowries, spiny combs and yellow dragon-castles had outgrown their glass cabinet and overflowed into three carefully catalogued packing cases.

To Sutter, anyone who liked shells was a person above suspicion. Thus it was that two days later, after a casual checking of the bearded man's references, he invited Travail to move in with him.

During those two days Sutter tried unsuccessfully to put his new television set into operation. But the set refused to work. Turn the queer dials as he would, all he could get on the elliptical screen was a blur of blinding colors.

On the evening of the third day Travail looked up from his newspaper, said, "It says here that the president of the Federal Union Congress is going to make a speech in New Paris. Will you tune him in?"

Sutter frowned. "I would," he said, "but my set is out of order. I should call a repair man, but I had hoped to get it regulated myself."

Travail laid down his pipe. "Out of order, eh?" he said. "I'm sort of handy with gadgets. Let me take a look at it."

He walked across to the cabinet, turned it around and stood peering at the complicated chassis.

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A small brass nameplate caught his eye: *Manufactured by the Tanganyika Company, Dodoma, Empire of Tanganyika, East Africa. Under charter of the Atomic Commercial Enterprise Commission. Warning: Permit only an accredited employee of this company to touch wiring.*

Travail snorted. "Accredited employee, my foot! I know as much about these things as they do."

He went into the kitchen and returned with a screwdriver. While Sutter looked on with apprehensive eyes, he began to tinker with the wiring. Suddenly there was a dull report and a flash of flame. Travail jerked his arm back as a thin streamer of smoke and the smell of burning insulation entered the room.

"You've broken it," said Sutter accusingly.

But his voice died abruptly as the screen flared into light and a low hum sounded behind the panel. An instant later the light became subdued and a streak of tawny yellow took form. The yellow slowly coalesced into a sandy stretch of beach with long rolling swells washing up on it, to recede in a smother of foam. Through the amplifier came the muted roar of the breakers and the low soughing of the wind.

"Well, we got something at any rate," Travail said. "I wonder what it is."

Sutter stared, fascinated. The view of the beach seemed to come into sharper focus as he watched, and he saw now that it was an incredibly lonely scene, with the sea stretching away to a vanishing point and a stand of stunted spruce flanking the width of sand. But what caught his eye and held him almost in a trance was the array of objects littering the sand at the water's edge.

They were shells. Not the prosaic commonplace shells usually found on a New England shore nor even the brighter colored, more intricately formed shells of tropic seas. These were shells he had never seen before, even in library collections. Alien and soft-hued and lovely shells that caused his collector's heart to jump wildly. He saw a delicate star-shaped thing that might have been fashioned of porcelain and enameled with the brush of the Mings. He saw spiral coverings from uncatalogued cephalopods, many chambered and many hued. He saw shells of a thousand shapes and designs, all incredibly beautiful . . .

Sutter forgot everything else as he sat there staring at that collector's paradise.

"I'll see if I can get something else," said Travail.

"No!" said Sutter quickly. "Don't touch it!"

He continued to stare hungrily at the alien shells until suddenly the scene before him grew dim, then faded completely away.

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Travail laughed shortly. "Somebody sold you a fluke. This set must be an off brand. Incidentally, isn't Tanganyika a colony governed by the Federal Union Congress?"

"Yes, it is," replied Sutter. "I don't understand this at all. There's no *Empire* of Tanganyika."

Next morning after breakfast Sutter announced that he was driving into the country to visit a friend. There was no reason why he should not have told his roommate the truth—that he was going to look up the man who had sold him the TV set. No reason except for the odd fact that Travail had made no mention of the alien shells, and Sutter kept thinking that a shell collector would have been immediately aware of the rareness of them.

Once again Sutter drove out across state and down the highway where he had seen the roadside stand. But when he reached the spot there was no sign of the stand. The big oak tree which had shaded it and the rail fence on the adjoining property were there. But no stand. As Sutter stared with perplexed eyes at the spot he saw something he had not noticed before.

At the edge of the highway was a large granite boulder with a bronze plate fastened to its slanting surface. Sutter got out of the car, approached it and read:

This property has been preserved as a State Park to commemorate the first successful trial explosion of the Hydrogen Bomb which took place on this site and marked the beginning of an era.

It seemed to Sutter as he stood there that the surrounding silence grew more intense. Then he passed through a wide gateway and began to stride across an evenly clipped lawn toward a grove of trees beyond. Halfway he paused and glanced absently at his watch. It was exactly twelve o'clock noon.

And abruptly the scene before him slipped out of plumb. The sky and the lawn seemed to alter positions, to rotate madly as in a vortex. The whirling ceased and the next instant Sutter stood on the shore of a lonely sea with a tawny width of sand stretching out before him and the waves washing up almost at his feet. Then he saw the shells . . .

It was the beach of the alien shells! There they lay, scattered about the sand, hundreds, thousands of them, alien and delicate and lovely, exoskeletons the like of which he had never seen before. Their pastel colors blended with one another to form a horizontal rainbow extending into the measureless distance.

And somehow, as Sutter walked among them, picking his way with care, the years of his life seemed

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to slip away and he was a small boy at the seashore again, entranced with his first shell discovery. He could even hear his mother's voice calling "Be careful, Martin! Don't go too far!"

He walked on and on, slowly, uncertainly, until the beach and the sea began to waver like a heat mirage. And suddenly the shells and the water vanished and he was on the green grass again with the grove of trees just ahead. He turned, saw a white highway with his car parked on the shoulder.

Dazedly, Sutter walked back to the car . . .

All next morning he ruminated over his strange experience. Toward noon the pieces of the puzzle began to fit slowly together in his mind. But the partial answer at which he arrived seemed too fantastic for belief. Could it be possible that when he had stopped at the roadside stand he had blundered, in some inexplicable way, into another dimension?

Sutter had a layman's knowledge of Einsteinian physics, and he knew that experiments in Time were being made every day. Only last week he had read in the paper of an army officer who had reportedly Time-traveled some twenty-two minutes. And a year ago the Belgian scientist, Delgar, claimed to have entered a secondary world which he declared impinged on our own.

Assuming all this to be true, then it could be that the Tanganyika television set was a product manufactured in Future Time by a company that, by Sutter's Time standards, didn't yet exist.

The following day saw Sutter begin an experiment of which he was rather proud. Travail had said that he had tried to tune in the noon news broadcast yesterday on the TV and had turned the set on from twelve o'clock until five minutes after. At a nearby appliance store Sutter purchased a clock control which would turn his television set on and off at any chosen time. He set the control for two o'clock, then managed to lure Travail out of the house for the afternoon by giving him an invitation he'd received for a lecture on marine life at a local club. Next, he drove again to the H-bomb site and stood waiting in the grass-like park, watch in hand.

At precisely two o'clock there came that queer staggering of earth and sky. The trees gave way to the stretch of sand; the waves, leaden-colored and cheerless, dotted with white caps rolled up on the lonely shore. As before Sutter felt that same exhilaration, that same reversal to the spirit of his youth. But despite his mental excitement he maintained an awareness of the situation and a remembrance of why he had come here.

When he walked among the shells this time he carried a large basket with him and he picked up

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shells and dropped them into the basket, selecting those that were the most alien.

In due time the basket was filled to overflowing and Sutter stood still, waiting. Once more the surrounding landscape underwent its change. After the whirling had ceased and the initial feeling of vertigo had passed Sutter carried the full basket back to the car and began the long drive home.

As he drove he mused over what Travail would say when he saw these shells. Then on second thought, he decided not to show them to him. Travail was getting on his nerves. He had obviously lied about his interest in shells. On discussing the subject with him Sutter found he did not know the first thing about them. In fact, he regretted taking him in as a roommate.

He was convinced that Travail's friendly good-fellowship attitude was just a pose, cloaking a so far mysterious motive. But it could be that Travail knew of the value of Sutter's shell collection. Yesterday a letter had come from the Federal Arts Museum offering five thousand credits for the lot, and while he had made no mention of the amount, Sutter had been foolish enough to tell Travail there had been an offer.

"Are you going to sell?" Travail had asked.

"Certainly not. They're worth five times the price they offered."

"Are they really?" said Travail. "That makes my own collection seem worthless by comparison."

Oh, Travail could be clever all right! Why else had he made no comment about the alien shells they both had seen on the television set, if he did know something of the value of shells?

Arriving home, Sutter entered by the rear door and carried the basket of shells to his bedroom. There he took them out and one by one spread them on the table. He drew a goose-necked lamp down close and from the table drawer took out a powerful ato-magnifying glass. Then he selected one of the larger shells and began to examine it.

After a while he took a small keyhole saw which he kept for such purposes, and very carefully began to cut the shell into two equal portions. Once again he moved the ato-glass and began to study one of the sections. But the lamp was not very powerful, and insufficient for the tiny details. Sutter abruptly remembered the four-position lamp in the sitting room. He took the shell and the ato-glass and went to the front room, hoping that Travail was not there.

To his relief he found the sitting room deserted. The television set stood silent in a corner and as he passed it Sutter switched it on, then crossed to the four-position lamp and turned it up full. For a

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second time he peered through the ato-glass long and intently.

The bi-sected shell appeared to be a spinal univalve, resembling the familiar cephalopda, *nautilus,* with thin septa dividing the many chambers.

Behind him the Tanganyika TV swelled on, the screen presenting that same scene of the beach of shells. As it did so Sutter uttered a startled exclamation.

Under the magnifying glass the chambers in the bi-sected shell suddenly became more than outgrowths of marine organism. *They were rooms!* Tesselated ceilings, microscopically mosaic inlaid floors, long sweeping staircases with graceful slender balustrades and tall almost Ionic columns. . . .

Heart pounding, Sutter looked again.

He saw that it was actually the light from the television set that was illuminating the interior of the shell, lighting it with a strange radiance that seemed to extend outward from the shell in a steadily widening cone. His hand touched this cone, and it possessed a curious solidity.

He hadn't been mistaken. *There were rooms in that shell!* Narrow corridors with arched doorways opened off alcoves and galleries. One vaulted chamber had a kind of dais in the center of it. The entire inner structure was fashioned of pastel-tinted walls which caught the light of the TV and radiated it to every corner in a soft glow of effulgence.

A magnetic lure swept over Sutter. He felt an overwhelming desire to step into that cone of light . . .

Whether the exoskeleton expanded to admit his entrance or whether his own figure magically dwindled he could not tell, but the next instant he found himself in a fairy palace with all about him a world of silence.

A long broad hallway stretched before him. At the far end a ramp angled upward to a higher level. Sutter walked forward slowly, aware in a vague way that he had entered another plane that was at once a microcosm and a macrocosm. On the second level the way ahead divided. After a moment's hesitation he chose the left hand passage, passing through a keyhole-shaped archway into a broad amphitheater, empty of furnishings, with a kind of terrace or gallery at the far end. Emerging upon that gallery, Sutter saw that he had reached the outer limit of the shell. The edges of the wall before him were cut off, jagged and rough, where his saw had done its work.

He was looking out upon the normal world that was his living room.

He stiffened as the door to the room opened and Lucien Travail entered. He sat down before the center table and carefully, systematically began going through

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the contents of the table drawer. Startled, Sutter watched from his strange vantage point. Travail had not noticed that the television set was turned on, and the high-backed davenport apparently hid the cone of blue light from his view.

He took a sheet of paper from the drawer, began reading it. With a start Sutter recognized his letter from the Federal Arts Museum.

And as a wave of wrath swept over him, Sutter saw that the beach scene on the television set was slowly fading away. Fear and a realization of his strange position struck him. He turned and ran madly back across the amphitheater, down the ramp and along the long hallway to the point where he had entered the shell. Even as he approached it the cone of blue light dimmed, wavered and was replaced by a wall of partial blackness.

Sutter sent his hands clawing desperately at that wall as it flickered twice and momentarily became translucent again. He forced his body between folds of palpable darkness, slid into the vanishing blue cone. Instantly he found himself in his normal world, standing in the center of the sitting room. Travail looked up, startled.

"Hullo. Where did you come from?" he said finally.

Sutter said, "What are you doing in my drawer?"

"I was looking for my tobacco pouch," Travail replied easily. "I'm sure I left it here on the table last night. I thought the maid might have put it in the drawer."

In his bedroom Sutter wrapped each of the alien shells in a sheet of newspaper and restored them to the basket. He placed the basket on the top shelf of the closet, concealing it with a couple of old hats.

He didn't sleep well that night. His mind reviewed over and over his strange experience. Toward morning he fell into a deep sleep and dreamed a wild dream of walking down a broad highway, flanked on one side by an endless line of television sets and on the other by man-high hills of alien shells.

He had his breakfast at the little coffee shop around the corner. But halfway back to his apartment he suddenly thought of Travail alone in the house with his shells. He broke into a run and he was panting for breath when he reached his door.

The basket of shells was still on the shelf, but the newspaper wrappings were loosened, and the bi-sected shell was entirely free of covering. And he had not left them that way last evening.

Had atomic transmigration attempted to draw the shells back into the Time sphere to which they really belonged? Sutter was a logical man, and even as this thought came his mind rejected it.

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It must be Travail. He had taken a sample shell from the basket and even now perhaps was dickering with the officials of the Federal Arts Museum on a price.

Sutter picked up the bi-sected shell and went into the sitting room. He carefully placed the shell upon the table so that the light from the television set would fall directly upon it. Then he sat down to wait.

As he waited he mentally viewed the material prospects of his discovery.

If the Federal Arts Museum had offered five thousand credits for his old collection, they would surely double their price on these rarities. He saw himself the recipient of a fat check, his name and picture in the papers, television interviews, lecture assignments, world-fame . . .

And to think that Travail had the brazen nerve to believe he could cash in on his good fortune!

"Damned bearded coot!" Sutter mumbled to himself. "He must take me for an utter fool!"

Footsteps sounded and his bearded roommate entered the room. Was it fancy or did Sutter see in those grey eyes a gleam of mingled avarice and satisfaction?

"Have a cigar?" said Travail casually.

Sutter shook his head. "You know I don't smoke." He crossed the room, adjusted the controls of the television set and watched the familiar beach scene come into sharper focus. As the sound of the washing waves boomed from the speaker, the cone of bluish light took form before the bi-sected shell. Sutter moved the shell slightly so that it lay at directly right angles to the panel of the TV set. Travail, drawing on his cigar, watched him curiously.

"What are you doing?" he asked at length.

"Little experiment. Stand over here and I'll show you. Here, in front of this cone of light."

Travail took the place indicated. His face was emotionless as he looked beyond the light into the bi-sected shell.

"Now walk forward," commanded Sutter.

"I'll do nothing of the sort," said Travail, starting to back away. "What are you up to anyway?"

Sutter had no plan in mind beyond an overwhelming desire to put a bad fright into his roommate in payment for what he considered a monstrous act of duplicity. It would serve Travail right if, once he entered the secondary plane of the shell, he would be forced to stay there a while. A good scare would cause him to leave, maybe.

Sutter moved up behind the bearded man and gave him a violent shove forward. "In you go!" he cried hysterically.

Travail pitched head foremost. But, spinning, he clutched at Sut-

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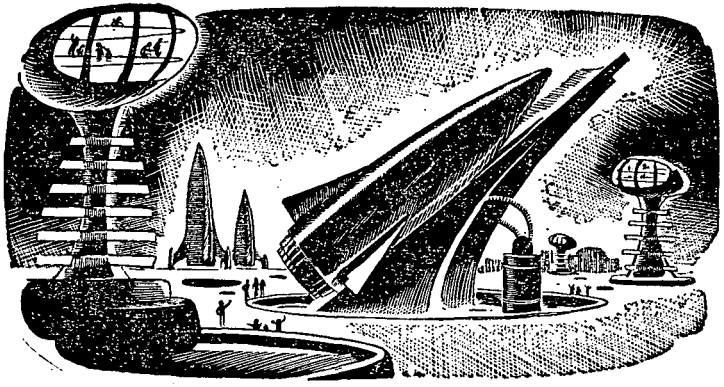
ter's arm, gripping it with the desperation of a drowning man. Half inside, half outside the cone of blue light he seemed propelled into the depths of the bi-sected shell by an irresistible force. In vain did Sutter fight to release the hold upon his arm. His squirming legs fastened themselves about the legs of a heavy windsor chair, kicked frantically.

The chair spun from between his feet and lurched heavily across the room where it fell hard upon the television set, shattering the glowing screen into a thousand fragments. Simultaneously, Sutter slid forward into the bi-sected shell as the cone of light vanished after him . . .

Mrs. Conworth, the landlady, reported the disappearance of her two roomers on August first, a week after she last saw them. First, however, to the disgust of the police, she cleaned their apartment, giving to the trash man all valueless and inconsequential articles, including a box of old sea shells which she found in the closet. It was a curious fact that neither Sutter nor Travail possessed relatives or friends to make inquiry as to their whereabouts and thus without incentive the official search died into nothing.

Mrs. Conworth rather regretted the loss of her bachelor roomers and, as she said to her neighbor across the street, she kept one memento of them—a thing that looked like a shell but wasn't a shell. She thought it must be one of them optical illusion things.

"When you look at it in a certain way," said Mrs. Conworth, "it seems as if there are two tiny men inside it, fighting to get out."



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when day is dun

by . . . Richard Matheson

What manner of sonnet would be a fitting epilogue at Earth's curfew?

Now bray goodnight to Earth
For day is dun and man's estate
Is cast into the vault of time
Tuck in the graveclothes of forever
Snuff the candle of attempt
And let fall across our eyes
That secret shroud of fusion
With dark mystery.

HE SAT UPON a rock and wrote his text on wood, using as pen a charcoaled finger. It is just, he mused, that the concluding theme should be set down with this digit in limbo, this beggarly palpus which once pointed at earth and sky to arrogate—I am your master, earth, your master, sky—and now lies grilled and temperate among the rubbish of our being.

I sit at Earth's wake and shed no tear.

Now he raised funereal eyes to float across the plain a glacial contemplation. Between his fingers rolled the sooty stylus and breath showed nasal evidence of his disgust. Now here am I, he brooded, perched upon a tepid boulder and inspecting that momentous joke which man has finally played upon himself.

Plumber turned author, courtesy of Smith-Corona, Dick Matheson sold his first story for eight cents. No, not to us. We're sorry we didn't discover him. His first sale was to his mother and here's his latest sale.

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He smote his brow and *"Ah!"* he cried, spiritually swept overboard. His great despairing head flopped forward on his chest and quavering moans beset his form. Birthright disembowled, he sorrowed, golden chance arust, man has found the way—but to extinction.

Then he straightened up to make his back a ramrod of defiance. I shall not be a cur bowwowing, he avowed, this mortuary moment shall not have the best of me. Yea, though death bestride me and pluck with spectral fingers at my sores I shall not cry for less; I am inviolate.

The tatters quivered royally upon his shoulders. He bent to write again:

Now let me relish death
As Earth gloats o'er her own demise
With eyes of shimmering slag.

One leaden edge of tongue peeped out through barricades of lip. Now he was hot.

Birds crow a serenade to man
Incinerated he
Prostrate sautéed skeleton
For all the gods to see
Birds peck a saucy tune with bristly nibs
Upon the xylophone of man's forgotten ribs.

"Capital! *Capital!*" he cried, stamping one unbooted foot upon the ashy soil. In the excitement of the phrase he dropped his pen and stooped to pluck it up. Here, deposed antennae, he grimaced the thought, and then he wrote again.

Odd it was, he scrolled, *that man throughout his ill-tuned history never ceased to plot man's own destruction.*

Chorus: *More than fantastic*
This alien two
Lived together
And never knew.

He paused. How to continue, he wondered, how go on with this concluding ledger of man's account. It demanded bite, a trenchant instantaneity and yet deceptive calm like forty fathom sea when gales are shrieking overhead. As there, so here, he thought, I must suggest the titanic with polished and well-mannered couplets. As for instance:

Tell me here
What difference there
To burn in bias
Or burn in fires.

I have no audience nor hope of one yet I go on composing till what needs be said is said. And then I go—my own way.

He reached into his pocket for the twenty-seventh time and drawing out the pistol, rolled its chamber with reflective finger. One bullet there he knew, his key to

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final rest. He gazed into the barrel's dark eye and did not quail. Yes, when it ends, he thought, when I have savored to the dregs this dark wine of most utter ruination, I shall press this to my head and blow away the last of man's complaints.

But now, he thought, back to my work. I have not done with mankind yet. A few words still remain, several discourteous racks of poesy. Shall I dispose so soon of what men always wanted most —the last word?

He flourished stylus, wrote:

Be this the final entry
In mankind's book of psalms
He knit his shroud with atoms
And dug his grave with bombs.

No. No, that did not catch the temper. He scratched it out. Let me see, he tapped a nail upon eroded teeth. What can I say? Ah!

Man the better
Man the higher
Man the pumps
The world's on fire.

But is this all quite fair, he mused amid chuckling, that I, as sole survivor, make such light of this unnatural tragedy which is the fall of man. Should I not instead sing out of mountainous regrets and summon tidal panegyrics which would wash away all bitterness with one great, cleansing surge. Should I not?

Man, man, he brooded, what have you done with your so excellent a world? Was it so small that you should scorn it, so drafty you should heat it to an incandescence, so unsightly you should rearrange its mountains and its seas?

"Ah," he said, "Oh . . . *ah!*"

His hands fell limp. A tear, two tears ran down his beak-shape nose to quiver on the tip, then fall upon the ground. And hiss.

What portent this, his mind groaned on, that I should be the last of man's embittered tribe. The very last! Portent this, vast moment this—to be alone in all the world!

It is too much, he cried aloud within his head. I reel at the significance. He fingered the gun. How can I bear to hold this crushing weight upon my shoulders? Are my words appropriate, my sentiments all fit for this immensity of meaning?

He blinked, released the pistol. He was insulted by the question. What, *I* not up to it; what, *my* words inappropriate? He straightened up and bristled at the ash-envapored sky.

It is *fitting,* he declared, that these last measures be composed by a man alone. For shall a pack of masons clamor round the stone, entangling arms in clumsy eagerness to chisel out man's epitaph? And shall a host of scriveners haggle endlessly on man's obituary, muttering and wrangling like

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a coachless football team in huddle?

No this is best—one man to suffer beautiful agonies, one voice to speak the final words, then dot the i's and cross the t's and so farewell to man's domain—ending, if not sustaining, in gentle poetry.

And *I* that man, *I* that voice! Blessed with this final opportunity, my words alone without a million others to dilute them, my phrases only to ring out through all eternity, uncontradicted.

He sighed, he wrote again.

It took this to make me individual
The killing of all men
Yea . . .

His head jerked up, alarmed, as, from far across the rubbled plain there came a sound.

"Eh?" he muttered. "What be that?"

He blinked, re-focused blood-streaked eyes, shook his head, squinted. And then his lower jaw slipped down and down until his mouth became a yawning cave.

A man was hobbling across the plain, waving a crooked arm at him. He watched the ashes rise in clouds of powder around the limping man and, in his mind, a great numbness struck.

A fellow creature! A comrade, another voice to hear, another . . .

The man stumbled up.

"Friend!" cried the man from out his startled face.

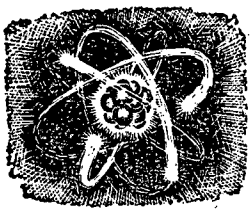
And abruptly, hearing this human voice usurp the mountainous, brooding silence, something suddenly snapped within the poet's brain.

"I shall not be robbed!" he cried. And he shot the man neatly between the eyes. Then he stepped across the peaceful body and went over to another rock of fused sidewalk.

He sat, shook back his sleeve. And, just before he bent to work again, he spun the empty chambers in his hand.

Ah, well, he sighed, for this moment, to have this glorious, shining doom alone—it was worth it.

Sonnet To a Parboiled Planet, he began . . .



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year of the big thaw

by . . .
Marion Zimmer Bradley

Mr. Emmett did his duty by the visitor from another world—never doubting the right of it.

YOU SAY that Matthew is your own son, Mr. Emmett?

Yes, Rev'rend Doane, and a better boy never stepped, if I do say it as shouldn't. I've trusted him to drive team for me since he was eleven, and you can't say more than that for a farm boy. Way back when he was a little shaver so high, when the war came on, he was bounden he was going to sail with this Admiral Farragut. You know boys that age—like runaway colts. I couldn't see no good in his being cabin boy on some tarnation Navy ship and I told him so. If he'd wanted to sail out on a whaling ship, I 'low I'd have let him go. But Marthy—that's the boy's Ma—took on so that Matt stayed home. Yes, he's a good boy and a good son.

We'll miss him a powerful lot if he gets this scholarship thing. But I 'low it'll be good for the boy to get some learnin' besides what he gets in the school here. It's right kind of you, Rev'rend, to look over this application thing for me.

Well, if he is your own son, Mr. Emmett, why did you write 'birthplace unknown' on the line here?

Rev'rend Doane, I'm glad you

In this warm and fanciful story of a Connecticut farmer, Marion Zimmer Bradley has caught some of the glory that is man's love for man—no matter who he is nor whence he's from. By heck, you'll like little Matt.

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asked me that question. I've been turnin' it over in my mind and I've jest about come to the conclusion it wouldn't be nohow fair to hold it back. I didn't lie when I said Matt was my son, because he's been a good son to me and Marthy. But I'm not his Pa and Marthy ain't his Ma, so could be I stretched the truth jest a mite. Rev'rend Doane, it's a tarnel funny yarn but I'll walk into the meetin' house and swear to it on a stack o'Bibles as thick as a cord of wood.

You know I've been farming the old Corning place these past seven year? It's good flat Connecticut bottom-land, but it isn't like our land up in Hampshire where I was born and raised. My Pa called it the Hampshire Grants and all that was King's land when *his* Pa came in there and started farming at the foot of Scuttock Mountain. That's Injun for fires, folks say, because the Injuns used to build fires up there in the spring for some of their heathen doodads. Anyhow, up there in the mountains we see a tarnal power of quare things.

You call to mind the year we had the big thaw, about twelve years before the war? You mind the blizzard that year? I heard tell it spread down most to York. And at Fort Orange, the place they call Albany now, the Hudson froze right over, so they say. But those York folks do a sight of exaggerating, I'm told.

Anyhow, when the ice went out there was an almighty good thaw all over, and when the snow run off Scuttock mountain there was a good-sized hunk of farmland in our valley went under water. The crick on my farm flowed over the bank and there was a foot of water in the cowshed, and down in the swimmin' hole in the back pasture wasn't nothing but a big gully fifty foot and more across, rushing through the pasture, deep as a lake and brown as the old cow. You know freshet-floods? Full up with sticks and stones and old dead trees and somebody's old shed floatin' down the middle. And I swear to goodness, Parson, that stream was running along so fast I saw four-inch cobblestones floating and bumping along.

I tied the cow and the calf and Kate—she was our white mare; you mind she went lame last year and I had to shoot her, but she was just a young mare then and skittish as all get-out—but she was a good little mare.

Anyhow, I tied the whole kit and caboodle of them in the woodshed up behind the house, where they'd be dry, then I started to get the milkpail. Right then I heard the gosh-awfullest screech I ever heard in my life. Sounded like thunder and a freshet and a forest-fire all at once. I dropped the milkpail as I heard Marthy scream inside the house, and I run outside. Marthy was already there in the yard and she points

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up in the sky and yelled, "Look up yander!"

We stood looking up at the sky over Shattuck mountain where there was a great big—shoot now, I d'no as I can call its name but it was like a trail of fire in the sky, and it was makin' the dangdest racket you ever heard, Rev'rend. Looked kind of like one of them Fourth-of-July skyrockets, but it was big as a house. Marthy was screaming and she grabbed me and hollered, "Hez! Hez, what in tunket is it?" And when Marthy cusses like that, Rev'rend, she don't know what she's saying, she's so scared.

I was plumb scared myself. I heard Liza—that's our young-un, Liza Grace, that got married to the Taylor boy. I heard her crying on the stoop, and she came flying out with her pinny all black and hollered to Marthy that the pea soup was burning. Marthy let out another screech and ran for the house. That's a woman for you. So I quietened Liza down some and I went in and told Marthy it weren't no more than one of them shooting stars. Then I went and did the milking.

But you know, while we were sitting down to supper there came the most awful grinding, screeching, pounding crash I ever heard. Sounded if it were in the back pasture but the house shook as if somethin' had hit it.

Marthy jumped a mile and I never saw such a look on her face.

"Hez, what was that?" she asked.

"Shoot, now, nothing but the freshet," I told her.

But she kept on about it. "You reckon that shooting star fell in our back pasture, Hez?"

"Well, now, I don't 'low it did nothing like that," I told her. But she was jittery as an old hen and it weren't like her nohow. She said it sounded like trouble and I finally quietened her down by saying I'd saddle Kate up and go have a look. I kind of thought, though I didn't tell Marthy, that somebody's house had floated away in the freshet and run aground in our back pasture.

So I saddled up Kate and told Marthy to get some hot rum ready in case there was some poor soul run aground back there. And I rode Kate back to the back pasture.

It was mostly uphill because the top of the pasture is on high ground, and it sloped down to the crick on the other side of the rise.

Well, I reached the top of the hill and looked down. The crick were a regular river now, rushing along like Niagary. On the other side of it was a stand of timber, then the slope of Shattuck mountain. And I saw right away the long streak where all the timber had been cut out in a big scoop with roots standing up in the air and a big slide of rocks down to the water.

It was still raining a mite and

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the ground was sloshy and squanchy under foot. Kate scrunched her hooves and got real balky, not likin' it a bit. When we got to the top of the pasture she started to whine and whicker and stamp, and no matter how loud I whoa-ed she kept on a-stamping and I was plumb scared she'd pitch me off in the mud. Then I started to smell a funny smell, like somethin' burning. Now, don't ask *me* how anything could burn in all that water, because I don't know.

When we came up on the rise I saw the contraption.

Rev'rend, it was the most tarnal crazy contraption I ever saw in my life. It was bigger nor my cowshed and it was long and thin and as shiny as Marthy's old pewter pitcher her Ma brought from England. It had a pair of red rods sticking out behind and a crazy globe fitted up where the top ought to be. It was stuck in the mud, turned halfway over on the little slide of roots and rocks, and I could see what had happened, all right.

The thing must have been—now, Rev'rend, you can say what you like but that thing must have *flew* across Shattuck and landed on the slope in the trees, then turned over and slid down the hill. That must have been the crash we heard. The rods weren't just red, they were *red-hot*. *I* could hear them sizzle as the rain hit 'em.

In the middle of the infernal contraption there was a door, and it hung all to-other as if every hinge on it had been wrenched half-way off. As I pushed old Kate alongside it I heared somebody hollering alongside the contraption. I didn't nohow get the words but it must have been for help, because I looked down and there was a man a-flopping along in the water.

He was a big fellow and he wasn't swimming, just thrashin' and hollering. So I pulled off my coat and boots and hove in after him. The stream was running fast but he was near the edge and I managed to catch on to an old tree-root and hang on, keeping his head out of the water till I got my feet aground. Then I hauled him onto the bank. Up above me Kate was still whinnying and raising Ned and I shouted at her as I bent over the man.

Wal, Rev'rend, he sure did give me a surprise—weren't no proper man I'd ever seed before. He was wearing some kind of red clothes, real shiny and sort of stretchy and not wet from the water, like you'd expect, but dry and it felt like that silk and India-rubber stuff mixed together. And it was such a bright red that at first I didn't see the blood on it. When I did I knew he were a goner. His chest were all stove in, smashed to pieces. One of the old tree-roots must have jabbed him as the current flung him down. I thought

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he were dead already, but then he opened up his eyes.

A funny color they were, greeny yellow. And I swear, Rev'rend, when he opened them eyes I *felt* he was readin' my mind. I thought maybe he might be one of them circus fellers in their flying contraptions that hang at the bottom of a balloon.

He spoke to me in English, kind of choky and stiff, not like Joe the Portygee sailor or like those tarnal dumb Frenchies up Canady way, but—well, funny. He said, "My baby—in ship. Get —baby . . ." He tried to say more but his eyes went shut and he moaned hard.

I yelped, "Godamighty!" Scuse me, Rev'rend, but I was so blame upset that's just what I did say, "Godamighty, man, you mean there's a baby in that there dingfol contraption?" He just moaned so after spreadin' my coat around the man a little bit I just plunged in that there river again.

Rev'rend, I heard tell once about some tomfool idiot going over Niagary in a barrel, and I tell you it was like that when I tried crossin' that freshet to reach the contraption.

I went under and down, and was whacked by floating sticks and whirled around in the freshet. But somehow, I d'no how except by the pure grace of God, I got across that raging torrent and clumb up to where the crazy dingfol machine was sitting.

Ship, he'd called it. But that were no ship, Rev'rend, it was some flying dragon kind of thing. It was a real scarey lookin' thing but I clumb up to the little door and hauled myself inside it. And, sure enough, there was other people in the cabin, only they was all dead.

There was a lady and a man and some kind of an animal looked like a bobcat only smaller, with a funny-shaped rooster-comb thing on its head. They all—even the cat-thing—was wearing those shiny, stretchy clo'es. And they all was so battered and smashed I didn't even bother to hunt for their heart beats. I could see by a look they was dead as a doornail.

Then I heard a funny little whimper, like a kitten, and in a funny, rubber-cushioned thing there's a little boy baby, looked about six months old. He was howling lusty enough, and when I lifted him out of the cradle kind of thing, I saw why. That boy baby, he was wet, and his little arm was twisted under him. That there flying contraption must have smashed down awful hard, but that rubber hammock was so soft and cushiony all it did to him was jolt him good.

I looked around but I couldn't find anything to wrap him in. And the baby didn't have a stitch on him except a sort of spongy paper diaper, wet as sin. So I finally lifted up the lady, who had

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a long cape thing around her, and I took the cape off her real gentle. I knew she was dead and she wouldn't be needin' it, and that boy baby would catch his death if I took him out bare-naked like that. She was probably the baby's Ma; a right pretty woman she was but smashed up something shameful.

So anyhow, to make a long story short, I got that baby boy back across that Niagary falls somehow, and laid him down by his Pa. The man opened his eyes kind, and said in a choky voice, "Take care—baby."

I told him I would, and said I'd try to get him up to the house where Marthy could doctor him. The man told me not to bother. "I dying," he says. "We come from planet—star up there—crash here—" His voice trailed off into a language I couldn't understand, and he looked like he was praying.

I bent over him and held his head on my knees real easy, and I said, "Don't worry, mister, I'll take care of your little fellow until your folks come after him. Before God I will."

So the man closed his eyes and I said, *Our Father which art in Heaven,* and when I got through he was dead.

I got him up on Kate, but he was cruel heavy for all he was such a tall skinny fellow. Then I wrapped that there baby up in the cape thing and took him home and give him to Marthy. And the next day I buried the fellow in the south medder and next meetin' day we had the baby baptized Matthew Daniel Emmett, and brung him up just like our own kids. That's all.

All? Mr. Emmett, didn't you ever find out where that ship really came from?

Why, Rev'rend, he said it come from a star. Dying men don't lie, you know that. I asked the Teacher about them planets he mentioned and she says that on one of the planets—can't rightly remember the name, March or Mark or something like that—she says some big scientist feller with a telescope saw canals on that planet, and they'd hev to be pretty near as big as this-here Erie canal to see them so far off. And if they could build canals on that planet I d'no why they couldn't build a flying machine.

I went back the next day when the water was down a little, to see if I couldn't get the rest of them folks and bury them, but the flying machine had broke up and washed down the crick.

Marthy's still got the cape thing. She's a powerful saving woman. We never did tell Matt, though. Might make him feel funny to think he didn't really b'long to us.

But—but—Mr. Emmett, didn't anybody ask questions about the baby—where you got it?

Well, now, I'll 'low they was curious, because Marthy hadn't

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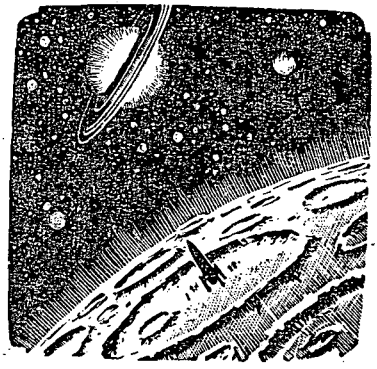
been in the family way and they knew it. But up here folks minds their own business pretty well, and I jest let them wonder. I told Liza Grace I'd found her new little brother in the back pasture, and o'course it was the truth. When Liza Grace growed up she thought it was jest one of those yarns old folks tell the little shavers.

And has Matthew ever shown any differences from the other children that you could see?

Well, Rev'rend, not so's you could notice it. He's powerful smart, but his real Pa and Ma must have been right smart too to build a flying contraption that could come so far.

O'course, when he were about twelve years old he started reading folks' minds, which didn't seem exactly right. He'd tell Marthy what I was thinkin' and things like that. He was just at the pesky age. Liza Grace and Minnie were both a-courtin' then, and he'd drive their boy friends crazy telling them what Liza Grace and Minnie were a-thinking and tease the gals by telling them what the boys were thinking about.

There weren't no harm in the boy, though, it was all teasing. But it just weren't decent, somehow. So I tuk him out behind the woodshed and give his britches a good dusting just to remind him that that kind of thing weren't polite nohow. And Rev'rend Doane, he ain't never done it sence.



The lead novelet in the next issue of FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *will be by the very gifted Margaret St. Clair and her newest story is a brilliant yarn of time in the future. You'll like* THE RATIONS OF TANTALUS. *And you'll also like the short stories by F. L. Wallace, George Whitley, Sam Carson, Algis Budrys, Philip José Farmer, Sam Merwin Jr., Lester del Rey, Idris Seabright, Dal Stivens, Frank Belknap Long, Philip K. Dick, and many others.*

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the goddess of wisdom

by . . . Robert Bloch

After six months on Galactic Service a five-day leave seemed hardly time to solve the mystery of a lovely stranger from far Outside.

LET'S NOT pull any punches. The first thing I wanted after I landed at Skyport was a female. Yes, that's right. I didn't say *woman*. I said *female*. There aren't any women at Skyport, except for one or two of the Officials, and there's no sense in wishful thinking.

But I'm not making any excuses for the way I felt. If you're one of the narrow-minded kind that's never left Earth nothing I'd say would convince you. But if you've ever been Outside you can understand. Particularly if you've been far Outside.

That's where I'd been—far outside the Galaxy—for six long months. Simple little phrase, isn't it? *Six long months*. But it doesn't mean to you what it means to me. It couldn't unless you've spent that length of time in prison or an asylum on Earth, or in a space ship Outside.

Maybe you swallow all that stuff about the glamor of the Galactic Service; maybe you think of a stretch of patrol or exploratory duty in terms of a luxury cruise in a 60-passenger Moonliner. Well, you're wrong. If you'd just gone through six months such

Only the irrepressible Robert Bloch could write this story. An uncautiously candid Dr. Kinsey report on Love of the Future Female. And wrapped around the legend of Minerva about whom the always-romantic graphic Greeks had the right word. Myth or maid—was she something desirable?

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as I'd been through you'd want female company and want it bad.

So here I was at Skyport, back after my six long months of imprisonment in an artificial cell, eating artificial food, breathing artificial air, living under artificial gravity. Six long months of monotony, of loneliness, of boring routine and enforced discipline. Six long months with nothing to see but the six long faces of my equally bored companions. You get so you know every thought in their heads, anticipate every word they can utter. Anticipate? You get so you *dread* the next thought, the next word!

Of course there's some relief when you land—if you can call risking your neck on some science-forsaken asteroid a relief. If you enjoy wearing a protectelope against blazing heat or bitter cold or deadly gas, you can actually get out and stretch your legs sometimes. All too often you have to stretch them pretty fast, before some new, unclassified denizen decides you'd make a good *entree* for dinner.

But I've got nothing to sell. So that's all I'll say about those six long months. Now I was back. I'd landed, taken the Decontamination routine, got my shots, my tests, my orders for the next trip out, and now I was ready for my five-day leave.

Five-day leave on Skyport! What a break that was! I'd been looking forward to it for so long.

I've already mentioned the absence of women. Now I can throw in a remark or two about the presence of Service Officials, Service Technicians, Service Observers and Service Police. Add a smattering of gouging, chiselling merchants and a good number of criminal riffraff, squeeze them all together into three square miles of tin-topped magnificence, and you have Skyport.

Think I'm griping? Well, let me tell you right now that it looked mighty good to me. Mighty good. I stepped out of Barrack No. 5 and headed past the gates, down toward the center of town. Dark-hour was due, and the incs began to blaze in the streets. It was a sight for space-sore eyes, and no mistake. Just to see lights, any kind of lights, was momentarily enough. Just to breathe air, fresh air, all the air I wanted, was wonderful! Just to feel marsh under my feet, to feel marsh and imagine it was earth—paradise!

New uniform on my back, a full exchange-clip in my pocket, and five full days of freedom; that was the setup. Five Mars-days, not Earth-days, but why quibble? This was no time for quibbling. I had a lot of things on my agenda.

I was going to hole up in one of the three Stopovers, just like a private citizen, and sleep in a real bed. A real bed, with soft silk sheets brought all the way from Earth . . .

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I was going to hit the best tavs and drink the best Earth beer; beer in cans, beer fresh from the pressurized reefer-units, beer from a place called Milwoky, umpteen million miles away . . .

I was going to look up Harley and some of the others, if they were around, and yarn about the good old days, and gripe about the Service . . .

But first of all, I wanted a female.

I walked down the street into town, gawking and marvelling the the way the old cowboys did in early times on Earth, five hundred years ago when they were just settling the west and entered some frontier outpost after a stretch on the range.

Come to think of it, this *was* frontier. This was the jumping-off place for Earthmen these days —the Last Frontier. Full of soldiers, Service people, crooks, gamblers, chisellers, brinkers and drifters. It was noise and bustle and cheating and drinking and it was tough as plutonium and crude as gerk—and I loved the sight and the sound of it at Dark-hour.

And more important still, I loved the thought of the contrast to come—the soft serenity, the palpable presence of an actual female. A man can relax, a man can lose his tensions, a man can find himself again, if there's a female around who can talk, who can listen, who can give him back those old illusions of grace and beauty. I wasn't seeking flesh, I was seeking spirit.

You get those ideas Outside. And when you come back, and you're in Skyport, you go to Ottar. You go to fat Ottar at his bar in the House of All Planets. You get yourself a room in his hotel, and you ask Ottar if he has any female guests. Females, transients waiting to take the space liners out again; females you can eat with, drink with, talk with.

You go to Ottar with hunger in your eyes. You find him sitting at the downstairs desk next to the bar and you say, "Long time."

And fat Ottar grins and holds out his hand. It isn't a nice hand —particularly if you believe that rumor about his having Marty blood—but you grasp it like a drowning man grasps a rope. And what fat Ottar could give me was much better than a rope.

I said, "I've got the shakes. I was wondering—"

He cut me off with a nod. "Too bad you weren't here about three months ago. A woman came here—"

"A *real woman?*"

"I wouldn't brink you. Young, too. With that yellow hair—what you call it?"

"Blonde."

"Yes. Like yours. Only longer. And she looked so." His fat hands made fat gestures.

"What happened?"

"Run off with a Chief."

I said something under my

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breath. Just my luck. Ottar shuffled to the reefer, got out a can of beer, pulled a posturchair up to the bar. He opened the can for me.

The beer was cold. Cold and *real.* I could actually taste it going down. That sense of reality was what I craved now more than anything else.

"Where's everybody?" I asked. "How's business?"

Ottar shrugged. "They're all like you," he said. "When the liners bring females they come in to see them, to talk. Otherwise, no." Then he leaned forward. "But there is a female here for you to see. You, only."

"What do you mean?"

"Just arrived, off Harley's unit."

I gaped. "Harley? You mean the old so-and-so is in town?"

"Yes and no."

"Don't brink me, Ottar. Where is he?"

"Death-side."

"No!" I stood up. "Of all the rotten, lousy news—"

"He was your friend. I am sorry." Ottar shuffled away and came back with more beer. He opened the cans with his nails. "Poor, poor Harley." He lifted the cans, extending one to me, and we drank to Harley. It wasn't much of a gesture, a grotesque way of showing sorrow and saying goodbye. But it was genuine. The beer, as I drank it, tasted sour. Poor old Harley gone death-side! Not good.

"What happened?" I asked.

Ottar said, "I can trust you?"

"I'm not in uniform now, Ottar. This is between friends—about a friend."

"All right. I'll level. Harley and I, we were partners. I put up the money for his unit. Prospecting, off-bounds. No permits."

"I thought he was freighting."

"That was the front. He wanted to wildcat for metals on unstaked asteroids. I got him clearance through the Chiefs."

"Don't tell me how you did it," I cut in. "It's all right. There must be dozens in the same game."

"Whatever he brought back, we split. I sold it for him, split the take fifty-fifty. And he was paying off on the unit. You know the job? Brand new, Foss model, auto-control." Ottar sighed. "You should see what it looks like now."

"Where it is?"

"Edge of the Private Strip. Right where it crash-landed two days ago. I got the signal on my tape, of course, when the unit hit grav. And I knew what that meant—something had gone very much wrong. I was out to the Strip in five *likhs.* Got there just as it came down. Luckily there was no explosion. Sometime or other he's set auto-control, and a Foss unit is tough. But the nose caved in, and everything buckled.

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The Emergency was on the way, and I had to do some fixing in order to get on board first. But as part-owner I made out all right."

"What did you find?"

Ottar gulped beer. "Harley must have hit something. Maybe he had a heart attack or a stroke. He must have just had time to set auto-control before he dropped. Dropped and hit something at grav. It was bad. Worst I've ever seen."

"You sure?"

"What other answer is there?" Ottar didn't look at me. "There was blood all over the cabin. And he was wide open, ripped apart, wedged there in the corner with his head blown off, nothing above the neck—"

"Damned fool would go out in a solo unit," I grumbled. I could see poor old Harley lying there mangled and I felt like crying.

"Here." Ottar pushed beer my way. "You wanted me to tell you about the female."

"She was on the unit?"

"Sitting there, strapped, staring at him. She must have strapped herself when they hit grav. She was all spattered with his blood."

"Did she kill him?" I snapped it out.

"Impossible. No weapons. And nobody could have done a job like that on a man. He was torn apart, I tell you, with his head exploded into nothing. Maybe he picked up something on the trip, something Emergency has never heard about; they're investigating, of course. Something to burst a man's head and insides wide open . . . Oh, forget, it!"

"What did the female say about it?"

Ottar shrugged. "Nothing. She doesn't talk."

"You mean she doesn't understand? Or is it shock?"

"No shock. She just doesn't talk. Can't. No sound at all."

"Where'd Harley pick *her* up?"

"How would I know? The Service is decoding his tape-records. But they're faked. Harley always faked them so he could sneak off to unstaked asteroids. He told me where he'd been when he came in each time. But now, of course, I'll never find out where he was this last trip. . . . It must have been way off the course, wherever he was. No specimens or metal in the unit—which is lucky for me, of course, with the Service investigating."

"What about the female?"

"Don't ask too many questions. I got her off the unit without anyone seeing her."

"But that's impossible!"

"They looked the other way." Ottar grinned. "Understand?"

I understood. And it wasn't any of my business. If some of the officials took graft, that was their department. I was sick of the Service, sick of hearing about Harley's death. I had five days' leave, and time was wasting.

I stood up. "This female—

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tell me, Ottar, what's she like?"

"I'll show you." Ottar rose, led the way. We went to the stairs and a little man came out of the back and took Ottar's place at the desk in case any customers came in while he was away.

Then we climbed the stairs.

I don't know how many rooms Ottar has in his establishment—more than anyone would suspect, from the looks of the place. All I know is that they're on both sides of a long hall, and each one has a glass panel set in the top of the door. There's a blind which drops from inside, for privacy. But unless the need for privacy exists the blinds stay up and you can look into the rooms as you pass.

"I knew you were scheduled back," Ottar was saying. "That's why I took her off the unit. Also, because I figured she might talk some day and then the Service would find out what Harley and I had been doing. But mostly I was hoping you could see her and try to find out something about what had happened."

I nodded. We went down the corridor, rounded a corner, reached the room at the further end of the hallway.

Ottar said, "She cannot—or will not—talk to me. She will not smile. She will not eat. She merely sits and looks at me as if she didn't like what she saw. And it hurts me because she is so lovely."

This was strange talk, coming from old Ottar. He wasn't usually susceptible to females, any females. Nor, for that matter, was Harley. There was something very odd here, and Ottar was right—I *did* want to find out what had happened to Harley.

"But what do you expect me to do?" I asked.

Ottar shook his head. "I do not know. All I ask is that you try." He led me to the door, halted before the glass panel. I looked inside. Ottar was right. Wherever she was from, whoever and whatever she was, she was lovely.

The female sat on the couch in the small room, sat to one side almost directly below my line of vision so that I stared down at her from above. She was wearing some kind of sheer smock that Ottar must have provided, but I paid no attention to that. I looked at *her*—at the smooth sweep of her limbs, at the white slope of her shoulders, at the classic contours of a face I'd seen many times before in dreams.

Her hair was woven darkness and her eyes had never known anything but light. Her mouth was a moulded magnet, and—well, Ottar was right. She was lovely.

"She looks like a woman," I whispered. "What's the catch here, Ottar? Is she dangerous? Does she bite? A carnivore?"

Ottar shrugged. "I don't think

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so. She made no attempt to resist when I found her, brought her here. It is just that she will not communicate. Perhaps you cannot even make her understand. But you can try."

"I'll try," I said.

"You are not afraid, then? Good. I see you are armed, in case she proves unexpectedly hostile. But I do not think she will trouble you in that way."

I didn't think she would trouble me in *that* way, either.

"Go ahead," Ottar said. "I'll be downstairs at the bar. Somebody may come in. Call if you need me. And try to find out about Harley. It is important that I know."

He shuffled down the hall. I opened the door, stepped into the room, closed the door behind me. Locked myself in and locked reality out.

That was the feeling. Standing on the other side of the door, looking at her, everything had been real. But once I was inside the room with her reality faded. We faced each other, total strangers. And I was suddenly a stranger to myself!

A stranger and afraid! Who said that? I used to read the classic tapes when I was earthside. I used to go out for six months at a time on Service assignments. I used to dream about females. I used to talk to Ottar about Harley's death. I used to look through a glass door at living dreams. . . .

That was reality, the Past. Now I stood in the Present. In the room with her. I looked down and she looked up. A moment, a minute, an hour, a century slipped by. The Present was infinity. . . .

A faint, foolish, far-off part of me was wondering, "Now what do you do? She doesn't talk. She doesn't even understand what you're here for. And what *are* you here for, anyway?"

Yes, what *was* I here for? My original purpose, my past purpose, was gone. She wasn't just a female. She was somehow less than that and somehow much, much more.

I can say that her hair was black and her skin was white and her lips were red, but that doesn't begin to describe the *intensity,* the pure depths of the color that clashed and flamed and blended, the colors that offered the beauty of her body to my eyes.

I can say that she was proud, that her every attitude and gesture made a measure of that pride. But I cannot describe how that pride seemed to be a part of her very being.

And I can say that, sitting there, she lifted her head and looked into my eyes. Gazed into my eyes. Stared into my eyes. *Flowed* into my eyes.

Her eyes were like warm suns, far away. Her eyes were like

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blazing suns, close at hand. Her eyes burned inside me. . . .

She was inside me, a part of me. And her mind was inside my mind communicating with me. . . .

"I am here. What do you wish of me?" her mind said to me.

Telepath? Perhaps. Whatever it was, it worked. She didn't talk, she communicated. And what *did* I wish of her?

"What'll I call you?" I thought.

"Minerva. That would be closest." Her mind grasped my thought, replied.

"Minerva?"

"The goddess of wisdom."

"Where did you learn that?"

"From your mind, now. You decided that I was the—equivalent—to Minerva."

It wasn't a voice inside my head. It was a sort of flowing. She did it with her eyes, I knew. They stared at me, hypnotized me.

"Yes," she assented.

"Yes, what?"

"You may sit down beside me."

I sat down very close to Minerva on the sofa. Close to midnight, ice and fire. "Where are you from?"

The communication I got in return was not formed in words but came to me in a familiar picture. Grass, trees, clouds, flowers —it was Earth!

"Earth?" I spoke aloud.

"No. Not Earth. I cannot tell you. There is nothing in your mind that would be a counterpart of the place I came from."

At least she was honest. I framed my next question. "Where did you meet Harley?"

"Harley?" She waited for me to form the concept of Harley.

Then she shook her head. The flow came. "I do not know this Harley."

"But you do! You came here with him on his unit!" I thought of Harley, lying dead with his smashed head, of her sitting strapped in a seat beside him . . . I pushed the thought away quickly, but she caught it.

"Yes. There was such a man on the unit. Was that Harley?"

I nodded. "How did you get on the unit?"

For a moment, blankness. Then, "I do not know. It happened to him before I was there."

"Before you were there? That doesn't make sense."

"It happened before I was there. I do not lie."

I believed her. But I did not understand.

"I am sorry," the flow came. "But there is no way of explaining."

"Then you can't tell me about Harley, and about the trip? About where he was going, where he'd been, how he died?"

Her eyes answered. "I am truly sorry. It all happened before I was there."

Suddenly I realized what I was doing—sitting here with the most beautiful female I'd ever known, asking questions with my mouth

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and getting answers from her eyes! It was crazy. It was interesting and it would have made somebody from Research Control very happy. But it was also a waste of my time. A complete waste of the five days leave I wanted to make the most of.

So she didn't know about Harley, and I believed her. So Harley was dead. Harley was dead and he'd stay death-side. And I was alive. Alive, after six months Outside. I'd come here in the first place wanting the company of a female. Wanting more than that, but not daring to hope —wanting love.

"Love?" She'd read my thoughts again. And she understood all of them, except the last. "What is this love?"

All right. I thought about love. About all kinds of love. And I thought about her. . . .

"No! It is not possible!"

She was honest. This wasn't a brink-job; there must be a reason. I asked for it. "Why?"

"There can be nothing of what you think between you and me. It is impossible. You are a *man*. But I am not a—you call it—*woman*. You understand?"

I didn't. All I could understand was that I was in the presence of perfection; that woman or no, she was more completely and utterly female than anything or anyone I had ever known or imagined. She was the essence of everything I wanted and needed. And we were alone together yet eternities apart. . . .

There must be some way of bridging eternity! There had to be! I asked the only question I could ask. "Are there other ways of expressing love for your kind?"

"Yes."

"And what are those ways?"

She hesitated a moment before communication came. It was as though she were learning, too. "With the eyes, I know. Or *through* the eyes. Mind to mind. Or my *being* to your mind."

"I do not understand." And a part of my mind said, "You're lying."

Her eyes answered. "I do not lie. It is an ancient way of love—the first way—which your kind have forgotten."

Mind to mind. Her being to my mind. "Then how do you—reproduce?"

The concept formed, the answer came swiftly. "Being to mind. Thought is the seed, but not as you know it. The male is the host."

"Host? You mean the male carries the child?"

"Not the way you understand. The male carries the seed within him for—your time—a week, perhaps. And we are born as you see me now."

"Full-grown? But how?"

"I cannot tell you. We are of a different order than mankind. *More*. I am today as I arrived

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here, as I will be forever. I can communicate, learn if I desire, but it is not necessary. I am complete in myself without adding anything further."

It didn't make sense, but it was self-evident. Whatever she was trying to tell me I already knew. She *was* complete. I couldn't imagine her as she might be *before,* and I couldn't imagine her changing. She was past, present, future—all incarnate. A beautiful statue, but alive. But this gibberish about gestation, parturition. . . .

"I cannot explain. You have no parallel concept to give me the words. There is my thought which is seed to that part of you which accepts it. And the—cells, you'd call them, although they are not cells—multiply swiftly. They grow in the warm, soft darkness. They feed and grow, feed and grow. And then—I am born. Always new, always the same. Forever and ever. This I know, although I was not told. There was no one to tell me."

She sounded like a class in metaphysics, or whatever they used to call it. But she looked like the most desirable woman ever created. And that's what she was to me. I moved closer to her; it was almost agony to be so close and not touch her.

"No," came the message. "It is not for you. You do not understand what it means. . . ."

I didn't. All I understood was that I wanted her, wanted her in any way possible; wanted love with the eyes, the mind, anything. I was once told that there are times when the merest touch is worth ten nights in a harem, and I'd laughed. I wasn't laughing now. Looking at her, I knew it could be true. It would be true, must be true for me.

"There's more to love than lips and loins may learn."

Was that her thought or mine? I did not know. All I knew was the need. And was it her need or mine?

She was staring at me now, and suddenly I sensed that she shared my sensation. She understood what I wanted, what I desired, because she desired it too. She'd warned me because she loved me. And because she loved me, she'd give herself in her own way.

"Yes." Her eyes said that. And her hands sought mine, the hands of marble, the hands of fire. We sat there in silence and our eyes met.

She gave me her eyes and all that lay behind them. And the first gift was loneliness. All the loneliness of endless space, all the loneliness of endless time. It surged into me, surged through me until I was filled with all that is empty. Now I understood why she held my hands—that was all she could do to keep my being from losing itself in the frozen void. As it was, I remained, retained my identity, and took the

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loneliness from her. It was her gift, and it became part of me.

Her second gift was memory. Not her memory but the memory of all who had gone before her. It was not words, it was not images, it was not thoughts; it was a whirling, incredibly flashing blend and blur of sense-impressions in which I found earth and marble columns, moons and craters, shattered stars and blazing suns set in a continuity which had nothing to do with time. It came to me swiftly, and incorporated without identifying. Again it was only the touch of her hands that saved me.

The third gift was warmth. Heat. Fire. Her warmth, her heat, her fire. It was love as I knew it, love as I had never known it, loved as I'd neved dared dream it. Worlds were split apart to make mountains. Mountains ripped asunder to spew lava. And the molten mass of it flowed to fuse us into pure flame. This was the love of the gods, which is fire. And out of fire comes life.

Her hands fell away. I sat back, gasping, trying to focus my eyes and my thoughts. I felt exhausted, but there was no feeling of emptiness. The incredible conviction came to me that perhaps she had spoken the literal truth —that I might now be carrying the seed. . . .

"Yes. Oh, yes! It is done now, as it was ever done, as it must always be done."

I closed my eyes. There was a churning inside me. I had to sleep, sleep, sleep without dreams or desire. . . .

When I opened my eyes again she was gone. The key was missing from the table and the door was open. I peered into the emptiness of the dawn-gray hall. Then, slowly I found my way through the corridor and down the stairs.

Ottar slept at his desk, his big head cradled in his arms. He jumped when I poked him.

He did more than jump when I told him that she was gone.

"But how could she go? I was here. I didn't see anyone. I didn't hear a sound. All at once I was asleep and that's all I remember."

I tried to smile. "That makes sense. She's a telepath, among other things. Which means she can probably use her mind as a hypnotic weapon, too. She put you to sleep and went on her way."

Ottar grabbed my shoulder. "What happened? What did you find out about Harley? Tell me."

"There's nothing to tell. She didn't know Harley. That's what she claims, and I believe her."

"How could that be? It doesn't make sense."

"Not our kind of sense." I sighed. "But there are other kinds of sense and other kinds of life in the universe."

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Ottar said, "Will you find her?"

I nodded. There was no sense saying any more. No sense tell-him that I'd never find her, never bring her back. Some man would see her soon, walking in the dawn, gaze into her eyes, then take her for himself whatever the risk. Before the day was out, I knew, she'd be in a unit bound for another world. She, or those before her, had known many worlds and would know many more as long as there are men who dare to desire a dream come true.

I thought about it all through the day, after I'd taken a room here at the Unit-el. It's Dark-hour again and I'm writing it down.

Gradually, I've figured it out. About poor old Harley and what happened to him, and about what happened to me. Harley hit some spot and landed, over a week ago. And he met Minerva's mother, if you can call her that. And they loved, if you can call it that. *"It happened before I was there,"* she had said to me.

Then he took off again in the unit. Alone. But he wasn't really alone. Because *"the cells multiply swiftly. They grow in the soft, warm darkness. They feed and grow, feed and grow."*

She told the truth when she said she didn't know Harley. Of course she didn't. And she didn't know her mother because she never saw her mother.

When she was born she was already on the unit—and Harley was already dead. Harley died when his head ripped open—and she was born.

I understand how, in searching my mind for concepts, she found the name Minerva. The seeds travel from world to world, from universe to universe, and man is the carrier and the host. In ancient times a man who could make such a journey was called a god. His offspring were gods or goddesses. It must have happened on Olympus, when Minerva was born. Yes, that was it.

I remember the legend of the goddess of wisdom now, of Minerva who *sprang fullbloom from the head of Jupiter.*

So it wasn't a legend. *"My being meets your mind. The cells feed and grow, feed and grow. . . . One week. . . . Full grown."*

And the seed grew in Harley's brain, where it has been planted. And in one week his head burst out there in space, and Minerva was born. My Minerva.

In a week, now, she'll reproduce again. But this time it's feeding and growing in *my* brain. It absorbs the bony parts of the skull and the skin expands incredibly. It drinks the blood and eats the soft gray nourishment and waxes fat in godliness as it sups on the wisdom of men. And then it springs, fullblown . . . In just one week. . . .

I can't write any more. My head is beginning to ache. . . .

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moon mad

by . . . Evan Hunter

THE NEWSPAPERS did not tell the whole story, you see. They reveled with the rest, gloried in Man's magnificent accomplishment. They rejoiced in the fact that a man had reached the Moon, and they did not reveal the secret of *how* he happened to be the first man, or *why* . . .

It started with a workman named Archibald McHale. He was a fine fellow, you understand, stout of chest and heart but thick between the ears. Penetrating blue eyes and a freckled nose, he had, and a curling Cupid's mouth, but a fine, strong jaw. But, alas, thick between the ears. Which was in no way a hindrance to his work, for his sole job was to tighten bolts and screw in screws. That and nothing more. Only that.

Archibald McHale's job was to tighten bolts and screw in screws.

There was a good deal of noise on the blasting grounds that day, and that may in part have caused the peculiar accident. The ship was being fueled, and you know how much noise that can make. Then, too, there was a great deal of last minute riveting to do, and a good many loose or crooked parts to be pounded into shape again. All in all, the noise was goodly and exceedingly loud.

The glamor boys of the atomic era are bound to be the pilots of the planes and the scientists who will make them go. But what about the little guys, the grease-monkeys, who put the ships together? Evan Hunter's sense of technical astuteness takes one on a mischievous and delightful space ride.

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And, of course, the air conditioning system had not yet been turned on inside the ship. It was the middle of August, as you know, and White Sands can get very hot in the summertime.

Not to mention the stiffness of that screw . . . .

It was perhaps the screw that caused the most trouble, and certainly it contributed strongly to the final outcome.

The screw was located behind the instrument panel. It was set precisely between the aft radar scope and the altimeter, both of which instruments jutted back, then sideways behind the panel. This peculiar jutting formed a small *cul de sac,* and the screw was inconsiderately placed directly in that small pocket. Originally it had been screwed in before the instrument panel was riveted to the side of the ship. It had been screwed in from behind the panel and McHale now wondered just what its actual purpose was, for it didn't seem to connect anything with anything else.

He could not figure this out. He had been told to tighten the screw. Well, a screw is tightened with a screwdriver. But he found that even his smallest screwdriver would not fit into the *cul de sac.* That was what made it difficult.

McHale lay flat on the deck and peered up at the elusive screw behind the instrument panel. It was hot in the cabin, extremely hot. The viewport and the smaller portholes were sealed shut. The heat had been building inside the ship since sunrise, and the sun was now at its zenith. Sweat poured down McHale's face as he stared up at the elusive screw, struggled to reach it with the screwdriver.

He aimed the point of the screwdriver at the head of the screw, moved the tool toward the screw. The handle of the driver struck the back of the radar scope. He moved the driver to the right. It struck something else—the back of the altimeter. He tried squeezing the driver in between the two instruments. It would not fit. He tried coming up at a sharp angle, reaching for the head of the screw with the point of the driver. He could touch the screw that way, but he could not turn it.

He said a naughty word—said it again.

He wiped the sweat from his face, withdrew the screwdriver, and rested for a moment.

"You there! What are you doing?"

The voice came from somewhere far above McHale. He glanced to his right and saw a shining pair of boots. He followed the boots up to the stripe on the breeches, allowed his eyes to travel up its yellow width.

"Answer me!" the voice ordered.

He still could see no face, and he had never spoken to a pair of

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boots and a yellow stripe in his life. Reluctantly, he edged his way clear of the instrument panel, looked up into a stern young face.

"Well?" the face said.

"Well, *what,* sir?"

"Well, what are you doing laying flat on your back? Are you supposed to be working here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Doing what?"

"Tightening a screw, sir."

"Which screw?"

"That one up there, sir."

"Then tighten it. If I catch you goofing-off again you'll get canned."

"Yes, sir."

The face retreated and the boots clanged across the deck and down the outside ladder.

McHale, of course, had no idea who the man with the boots was. He had threatened a canning, though, and McHale did not want to lose his job. He was not angry. After all, his job was to tighten that naughty-word screw and tighten it he would.

He got onto his back again, wiggled under the instrument panel. Carefully he edged the screwdriver into the pocket. The tip touched the screw. McHale sucked in a deep breath. The sweat poured down his face. He moved the screwdriver a fraction of an inch closer to the screw. Carefully he wedged the tip into the groove on the head of the screw. Even more carefully he worked his hand back, squeezing the handle of the driver between the two instruments.

"Hiya," a voice said.

It was close to his ear. It was harsh and it surprised him. His fingers jumped open and he dropped the screwdriver. He cursed softly, then patiently wiped the sweat from his face before turning.

The other face was about six inches away from his own. He rightfully reasoned that the owner of that face was also lying flat on the deck. He scrutinized the features, recognized Paddy O'Donnell.

"What the devil do you want, Paddy?" McHale asked.

"Just watching," Paddy answered. He was a small man with a longish nose that almost touched his thin lips. He smiled as he stared into McHale's eyes.

"Well, go watch somewhere else. I'm busy."

"I know you're busy. I couldn't be watching you if you weren't busy."

"I'm too busy for watching. You got nothin' to do?"

"Nary a thing. What is it you're doing, Archie?"

McHale welcomed the opportunity to share his burden with someone. "That fool screw up there; I've got to tighten it."

"Well, be at it. Don't let me stop you."

McHale wiped more sweat from his brow. He lifted the screwdriver, attempted to emulate the

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same near-successful operation as before.

"Hey, you're wrong," Paddy said.

"What?"

"You're going at it all wrong. You'll never get the driver in that way."

"Who are you to say?"

"Well, I can see it."

"You can see it? I've been fooling with this screw all morning and *you* can see it? Who the devil are you to be seeing it? Have you tried to screw it in?"

"No need to get sore, Archie."

"Well, I am sore. Why don't you go watch the fueling or something?"

"All right," Paddy said huffily. "I will!"

"And good riddance!"

Paddy wiggled out from under the instrument panel and McHale put down his screwdriver, wiped the sweat from his face, then reached for the driver again.

"Now where the hell . . ." he mumbled. He moved his hand to the right, to the left, forward. He clambered to his knees, then to his feet. The screwdriver was not on the floor. There was another man in the cabin now. He was working at one of the footlockers and he was using a screwdriver.

"Hey you!" McHale shouted.

The other workman stood up. "The name's Houlihan, Mac."

"And my name's McHale," McHale said.

"So what's chewing you?"

"You've got my screwdriver."

"Have I now?"

"Yes, you have," Mac shouted.

"So what?" Houlihan was big and red and sweat was pouring from his freckled brow. "I need it. It belongs to the company."

"Well, I'd like it back, if it pleases you. I've got to tighten a screw back there or this ship won't never get to the Moon."

"You're that important, are you?"

"Yes, I'm that important."

"Where's this screw you got to tighten?"

"Right over here."

McHale took the screwdriver from Houlihan's hands and walked back to the instrument panel. He bent down on his hands and knees and Houlihan did likewise.

"That little bitty screw?" Houlihan said dubiously.

"That's the one."

"And you ain't been able to tighten it yet?" Houlihan began laughing. "Oh, my God! That little bitty screw!"

"What're you laughing at?" McHale asked.

"Who's laughing?" Houlihan said, then choked on a fresh bellow.

Houlihan continued to laugh as he stood up and walked to the still inoperative airlock and out of the ship.

McHale pursed his lips together.

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Idiot—flannel-mouthed idiot! How did he figure the size of a screw made a difference in tightening it? Another of those wiseguys!

McHale dropped to his knees. He tilted his head under the instrument panel, looked up at the screw. Maybe if he sort of sneaked around it, came in between that there jut and this one.

He began sneaking. He came in at a 45° angle from the altimeter, cut right 20° before he reached the radar scope, swerved sharply, then rammed the screwdriver at the head of the screw.

By God, he had it. He had it!

He began to tighten—and a voice came loud and sharp and he reared back suddenly.

"Hey, you!"

McHale's head banged against the instrument panel and he dropped the screwdriver.

"You goofing-off again?" yellow-stripe yelled.

McHale sprang from behind the instrument panel. "You damned idiot! You made me drop the screwdriver!"

"What? Are you talking to *me* like that?"

McHale recognized the shining boots and the yellow stripe, but he didn't care. "Yes, I'm talking to *you!* You blathering idiot, I almost had it." He charged across the cabin, seized the young officer by the scuff of his neck and the seat of his pants. He hurried him to the door and threw him out bodily. Then he slammed the door and twisted the wheel that locked it.

"Do it this way, do it that way!" he roared. "Damn them all!" He pulled back his fist and slammed it at the steel bulkhead.

He walked around the cabin, hitting the bulkheads. When he reached the instrument panel he saw the loose naughty-word screw again—and he went completely berserk.

"I'll teach you, you little nut!"

He slammed at the instrument panel with his fist. Then he slammed at it again. He didn't hear the air conditioning system go on, so he hit it once more. Nor did he hear the cabin begin to pressurize. He simply kept hitting the panel with his big, hairy fists, cursing yellow stripe, and O'Donnell, and Houlihan, and that damned elusive screw . . .

They say it was a wonderful sight from the ground.

They say the rocket leaped from the blasting pit like a gigantic spear, heading straight for the sky, trailing a yellow stream from its jets. They say it streaked up into the sky, lost itself in the atmosphere, headed straight for the Moon.

It wasn't until four days later that they knew Archibald McHale was the first man to reach the Moon.

It took McHale that long to realize where he was, and to frantically announce the fact over the ship's radio.

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reel life films

by . . . Jacques Jean Ferrat

Pity the poor purveyor of mere entertainment in today's world. He can't afford to offend a soul, yet must have a villain.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago Cyril Bezdek and E. Carter Dorwin would have met in a private railway car belonging to one of them. They might even have met in a private train. At any rate they would have met in absolute privacy. But it being the present, they had to be content with a series of adjoining rooms taking up less than one half of a car on the Super-Sachem, fastest coast-to-coast train in the country.

Their meeting in private was very important. Upon its results hinged the future of Gigantic Studios, one of Hollywood's big three production companies.

Dorwin was the powerful plenipotentiary of the Consolidated Trust Company of Manhattan and backer of Gigantic's multimillion-dollar productions. He was on his way West to make sure that the interests of his bank were being adequately served by the studio.

Bezdek was Gigantic's supreme production boss. Former office boy, writer, prop man, assistant-director, director, producer, and story editor, he was the works—unless Dorwin decided otherwise

At least a contributing factor to the current cycle of science fiction movies being made in Hollywood is the touchiness of minorities having their nationals being portrayed as villains. Cinema-makers are now trying to avoid further boycotts by using space aliens for villains. But suppose some of our Extraterrestrial neighbors are also a bit touchy?

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during this meeting and pulled the props out from under him. He had thought Dorwin's trip sufficiently important to fly to Kansas City and get aboard the Super-Sachem to be with the banker during the remainder of his trip.

They had dined in the privacy of Dorwin's suite—Bezdek as befitted his tortured duodenum on yogurt and melba toast—Dorwin on caviar, consommé, a thick steak with full trimmings, and a golden baked Alaska accompanied by armagnac.

"How do you manage to keep thin?" Bezdek asked him, honestly envious. "Polo, tennis? Golf would never do it."

"I haven't exercised in ten years," said the banker, biting off the end of a Havana Perfecto. He studied the little movie-maker over the flame of his lighter. Outside, the flat expanse of Kansas rushed past through the night at close to a hundred miles an hour.

"Some people are lucky," said Bezdek, adjusting the broad knot of his hand-painted Windsor tie. He was remarshaling his thoughts and ideas. It was very important that he and Dorwin be in perfect accord before they reached Hollywood.

The banker, who was new to the movie-making branch of his business, spoke first. "I presume," he said finally, "that you're aware of the current feeling in our New York office?"

The movie magnate gestured carelessly with a Saxony gun-club sleeve, revealing a platinum wristwatch strap. "We hear rumors now and again," he said. "It's about our science fiction films." Bezdek avoided making it a question. He was far too shrewd for that.

The banker, finding himself thus at a disadvantage, said amicably, "It's not that the fantasy series isn't making money, understand." He paused, looking faintly distressed. "It's just that, frankly, we feel they're getting too far away from reality. Trips to Mars and Venus—strange creatures . . . It's not real—it's not dignified. Frankly, we question whether an institution like ours can afford to be connected with anything so—so ephemeral. After all . . ."

He paused as sounds of a scuffle in the corridor penetrated the room and something or somebody was banged hard against the door. Bezdek, frowning, jumped up nervously and went to the door, opened it, looked out.

"What's going on out there?" he inquired tartly. *"Ty!"*

"Sorry, Mr. Bezdek," said Ty Falter, the mogul's private secretary, bodyguard and constant companion. He was leaning against the far wall of the corridor, mopping a cut lower lip with a bloody handkerchief. He was a tall, deceptively sleepy-looking young man who virtually never slept.

At the end of the corridor two

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lesser aides were half-dragging a tall figure between them. Bezdek frowned as he caught a glimpse of a nodding head in half profile—a near-perfect profile which showed no sign of a bruise.

"How did that creep get in here?" he snapped. "That's the same character who tried to nail me at the K.C. airport."

"Yes, sir," said Ty Falter apologetically. He glanced at his skinnd knuckles. "It was like hitting a brick," he said. He shook his head, added, "Sorry, Mr. Bezdek. I don't know how he got in here."

"Your job is to keep crackpots like that away from me," said the mogul. He turned and went back inside the compartment. Dorwin was still sitting as before.

"Eavesdroppers?" the banker inquired with unruffled poise.

"Not likely," said Bezdek, dropping into his seat. "Probably a movie-crazy kid trying to chisel a screen test."

The incident had brought back his heartburn. He wanted to take a couple of his pills but not in front of Dorwin. The banker might think he was cracking up. These damned New Yorkers had no idea of the pressure under which he labored. He sipped a glass of flat soda water.

"Where were we?" Dorwin said quietly. Somehow to Bezdek he gave the impression of remorseless rationality. "Oh, yes, these fantasy movies—we're a little worried about them."

"I thought you might be," said Bezdek, leaning forward and using the full magnetism of his personality. Now that the issue was out in the open his discomfort was eased. "Actually we don't think of our interplanetary cycle as fantasy, Dorwin. We think of them as forecasts of the future, as prophecy."

"They're still a far cry from reality, or even the usual escapism," said the banker. "Confidentially, I happen to *know* that it will be years—perhaps decades—before we make any live contact with the other planets. Our national interests demand that we prevent atomic power from superseding older methods before investments have realized on their holdings to the fullest extent. And it is upon development of atomic power that space-flight hinges at present."

"Certainly I understand that—sound business," said Bezdek with his one-sided smile. "I hope they wait for many years."

Dorwin looked faintly astonished. "From these pictures of yours I must confess I had derived a totally different impression of your theories," he said slowly, flicking two inches of pale grey ash into the silver tray at his elbow.

"Listen to me," said the movie-maker, again leaning toward his vis-a-vis. "We're making these

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pictures now because when the first man or men come back from other planets our science fiction cycle is finished. It will cease to be *escape*. We will then be faced with the reality of what they really find—and that's bound to be a great deal different from the sort of thing we're feeding them now."

"It's a point I hadn't considered," said the banker, reaching for the brandy. He nodded to himself as he poured it, then looked up at Bezdek and asked, "But why this—space opera is the colloquial term, I believe? Why not stick closer to real life?"

Bezdek sat back and the slanting smile creased his features again. "Minorities," he said. "That's why. Crackpot minorities object loudly at being portrayed in films they don't like. We don't want to tread on anybody's toes—there's trouble enough in the world as it is. People want villains. But unless we make our villains—even minor villains—people from nowhere we get boycotted somewhere by somebody. And that costs us money."

"Yes, of course," said the banker, "but I fail to see—"

"It's simple." Bezdek was in full cry now and interrupted openly. "People like conflict in their movies. If it's a Western they want their heroes to fight Indians or Mexicans or rustlers. The Indians and Mexicans object to being the villains and they've got big sympathetic followings. Okay, so we use rustlers or renegade white men and we still make Westerns—but not many. No plot variety."

He sipped more soda water. "It's the same with everything else. Unless we're in a war with a legitimate enemy to hate we can't use villains. It's almost enough to make a man wish—"

"Not with the H-bomb, Bezdek," said Dorwin frigidly.

"Of course not—I was only speaking figuratively," said the movie-maker hastily. "I'm as much against war as anyone. But that's what makes these interplanetary movies great stuff. We can run in all the villains we want—make them just as bad as we want. Audiences really like to have someone they can hate."

"I see," said Dorwin. He permitted himself to look faintly pleased. "After all, a Martian can hardly protest what we do with him. I see your point now."

"You've got it," said Bezdek, beaming now. He leaned forward and added, "Furthermore, we've got four new pictures in the works for the space cycle that are really going to—"

He broke off, interrupted by a knock at the door. He stared at the banker, seeking someone to share his annoyance, found Dorwin staring out the window, frowning.

"The train seems to have stopped," said the banker.

Bezdek turned to the window.

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It was true. The night was clouded and dark but he could make out a single tree in faint silhouette and it was not moving. The knock on the stateroom door came again.

"I'd better see who it is," said Bezdek, rising. "Maybe something is wrong."

He opened the door quickly—all but fell back into his seat. The tall young man with the too-perfect features—the man who had tried in vain to speak to him at the Kansas City airport, who had been forcibly evicted earlier from the car—stood there!

The young man smiled and it was much too cold to be ingratiating if that was its intent. He said, looking down on both men, "I think you will wish to talk to me now."

The sheer effrontery of it rendered Cyril Bezdek speechless for the first time in years. Looking past the intruder through the angle of the open door he could see Ty Falter sitting on the corridor floor, leaning against the wall. His eyes were closed, his head canted at an odd angle.

It was Dorwin who first found words. "Who are you?" he inquired. "What do you want?"

"I am from Mars," said the stranger. "I have come here to enter a protest against the manner in which Mr. Bezdek's motion pictures are portraying my people."

The movie-maker's mouth dropped open. He closed it quickly, glanced across at the banker, saw equal bewilderment on that usually poker-face. On impulse, Bezdek reached for the buzzer that would summon aid and pressed it firmly several times.

"No one will answer," said the intruder in a voice remarkable not for its accent but for its lack of any. "We have been forced to —to immobilize this train in order to see you. It has been very difficult to reach you, Mr. Bezdek, I am sure through no fault of your own. But the people of my planet feel very strongly about this matter and I must get some satisfaction for them."

"So help me," said the mogul, his thin face purple with anger, "if this is a gag I'll see you jailed for it! And before you're jailed you're going to have a very unpleas—"

"No, Mr. Bezdek—Mr. Dorwin —this is not a joke. We of Mars are proud of our culture, our civilization. We do not like being portrayed as evil and ridiculous creatures. We're not like those filthy Venerians. We Martians have a great self-respect."

"Ostrich feathers!" Bezdek roared at the dead-panned intruder. "You may not be aware of it but there are severe penalties for holding up a train on this—in this country. You can't go around slugging people either. Look at Ty out there."

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"Your servant will be all right," said the intruder, "as will the others aboard this train. I can release them whenever you agree that my mission is to be taken seriously."

"All right," said Bezdek, whose mind was nothing if not acrobatic. "Suppose you are from Mars. Tell me why your people object to our movies. Surely they aren't seeing them on Mars?"

"No. But your Earthmen will reach our planet soon and your opinion of us will be shaped in some degree by these movies they have seen. And since the relationships of the near-future are of vital import to us now we must not be represented as other than we are. Such misconceptions could breed interplanetary war." He shuddered.

"I think you're crazy!" said Bezdek. He turned to the banker, who was again staring out the window.

"There's something out there—look," said Dorwin.

"That is our ship," the intruder told them blandly. "That is why we stopped the train here. It is the only flat area sufficiently unsettled for our landing and departure without detection. We must return at once or lose perihelion."

"Let me see," said Bezdek. He peered through the window. There *was* something out there—something black and vague and shaped like an immense turtle with jagged projections. He tried to tell himself he was seeing things, failed.

"Amazing!" said E. Carter Dorwin. "It's utterly amazing!"

"Incredible is the word for it," Bezdek said wearily. He faced the intruder, said bluntly, "Very well, you say you're from Mars. And I say to your face that you aren't!"

"You seem remarkably sure, Mr. Bezdek."

"And why not?" The moviemaker was in his element now, delivering the clincher in an argument. "Our scientists have proved conclusively that Earthmen cannot exist on Mars without spacesuits. You say you're a Martian. Yet you look like one of us. So if you can live on Mars, how can you live in our atmosphere without a space-suit of some sort? There's one for you to answer!" He chortled.

"But I *am* wearing protection—a protective suit arranged to give the impression that I am an Earthman." A flicker of something akin to distaste passed over his singularly immobile face.

"I'd like to see what you *do* look like," said Dorwin, suddenly entering into the eerie conversation.

Something like a sigh escaped the intruder. Then he said, "Very well. It is important that you believe me, so—" His hands went to the top of his scalp and deliberately he peeled the life-like mask slowly from the hidden

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features of his thoroughly Martian face!

It was a very odd face—not at all human. It reminded Bezdek a little of an immutably sad bassett-hound he kept in his Hollywood kennel. It made Dorwin think of his mother-in-law. It was not a frightening face and the single eye in the center of the forehead held them with its mournful regard, held them, held them . . .

When they were thoroughly under its hypnotic spell the Martian began to speak softly . . .

Ty Falter was slow in waking up. But when he realized that he was lying there in the corridor he came to with a start. If Bezdek ever found out about this he'd be cooked as far as Hollywood went!

He got to his feet, his unsteadiness helped not at all by the fact that the train chose that moment to start with a jerk. He grabbed at the wall as a meteor flashed through the dark of the Kansas night outside the window.

Funny, he thought, the damned thing was going *up,* not *down.* But he forgot about the meteor as he heard the voices coming from the stateroom he was being paid to guard. He reeled over to the partly opened door and listened.

Bezdek was talking volubly, enthusiastically as he did when he spoke of the actual making of a picture. ". . . so we'll only have to reshoot a few sequences, Dorwin. The cost will be nothing compared to the returns. Think of it! Our space-pilot hero crashes on *Venus.* He has to fight horrible slimy swamp creatures—we can make them look like crocodiles with six or eight legs—to reach the mountaintop where the girl is hiding . . ."

He paused and Dorwin said gravely, "I'm glad, since these space operas seem to be necessary, that you have decided to locate them on a *real* planet like Venus rather than a *fictitious* one like Mars. If minority pressure groups force us to use fantasy then it is as well to stay as credible as possible."

"Right, Dorwin! Right on the nose!" cried Bezdek. "And we can make real villains out of these Venerians, real bang-up nasty heavies!"

The banker's voice came through the door again. He said doubtfully, "But how can we be sure about the Venerians . . ."

"Because I can feel it *here!*" cried the movie-maker. The thump that accompanied his final word told Ty that his boss had smote himself dramatically over the heart as he delivered the climactic line.

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where the world is quiet

by . . . C. H. Liddell

Fra Rafael saw strange things, impossible things. Then there was the mystery of the seven young virginal girls of Huascan.

FRA RAFAEL drew the llama-wool blanket closer about his narrow shoulders, shivering in the cold wind that screamed down from Huascan. His face held great pain. I rose, walked to the door of the hut and peered through fog at the shadowy haunted lands that lifted toward the sky—the Cordilleras that make a rampart along Peru's eastern border.

"There's nothing," I said. "Only the fog, Fra Rafael."

He made the sign of the cross on his breast. "It is the fog that brings the—the terror," he said. "I tell you, *Señor* White, I have seen strange things these last few months—impossible things. You are a scientist. Though we are not of the same religion, you also know that there are powers not of this earth."

I didn't answer, so he went on: "Three months ago it began, after the earthquake. A native girl disappeared. She was seen going into the mountains, toward Huascan along the Pass, and she did not come back. I sent men out to find her. They went up the Pass, found the fog grew thicker and thicker until they were blind and could see nothing. Fear came to

The life of an anthropologist is no doubt filled much of the time with the monotonous routine of carefully assembling powdery relics of ancient races and civilizations. But White's lone Peruvian odessy was most unusual. A story pseudonymously penned by one of the greats in the genre.

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them and they fled back down the mountain. A week later another girl vanished. We found her footprints."

"The same canyon?"

"*Si*, and the same result. Now seven girls have gone, one after the other, all in the same way. And I, *Señor* White—" Fra Rafael's pale, tired face was sad as he glanced down at the stumps of his legs—"I could not follow, as you see. Four years ago an avalanche crippled me. My bishop told me to return to Lima, but I prevailed on him to let me remain here for these natives are my people, *Señor*. They know and trust me. The loss of my legs has not altered that."

I nodded. "I can see the difficulty now, though."

"Exactly. I cannot go to Huascan and find out what has happened to the girls. The natives—well, I chose four of the strongest and bravest and asked them to take me up the Pass. I thought that I could overcome their superstitions. But I was not successful."

"How far did you go?" I asked.

"A few miles, not more than that. The fog grew thicker, until we were blinded by it, and the way was dangerous. I could not make the men go on." Fra Rafael closed his eyes wearily. "They talked of old Inca gods and devils —Manco Capac and Oello Huaco, the Children of the Sun. They are very much afraid, *Señor* White. They huddle together like sheep and believe that an ancient god has returned and is taking them away one by one. And—one by one they *are* taken."

"Only young girls," I mused. "And no coercion is used, apparently. What's up toward Huascan?"

"Nothing but wild llamas and the condors. And snow, cold, desolation. These are the Andes, my friend."

"Okay," I said. "It sounds interesting. As an anthropologist I owe it to the Foundation to investigate. Besides, I'm curious. Superficially, there is nothing very strange about the affair. Seven girls have disappeared in the unusually heavy fogs we've had ever since the earthquake. Nothing more."

I smiled at him. "However, I think I'll take a look around and see what's so attractive about Huascan."

"I shall pray for you," he said. "Perhaps—well, *Señor*, for all the loss of my legs, I am not a weak man. I can stand much hardship. I can ride a burro."

"I don't doubt your willingness, Fra Rafael," I said. "But it's necessary to be practical. It's dangerous and it's cold up there. Your presence would only handicap me. Alone, I can go faster—remember, I don't know how far I'll have to travel."

The priest sighed. "I suppose you are right. When—"

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"Now. My burro's packed."

"Your porters?"

"They won't go," I said wryly. "They've been talking to your villagers. It doesn't matter. I'll go it alone." I put out my hand, and Fra Rafael gripped it strongly.

"*Vaya con Dios,*" he said.

I went out into the bright Peruvian sunlight. The Indios were standing in straggling knots, pretending not to watch me. My porters were nowhere in evidence. I grinned, yelled a sardonic goodbye, and started to lead the burro toward the Pass.

The fog vanished as the sun rose, but it still lay in the mountain canyons toward the west. A condor circled against the sky. In the thin, sharp air the sound of a distant rock-fall was distinctly audible.

White Huascan towered far away. A shadow fell on me as I entered the Pass. The burro plodded on, patient and obedient. I felt a little chill; the fog began to thicken.

Yes, the Indios had talked to me. I knew their language, their old religion. Bastard descendants of the Incas, they still preserved a deep-rooted belief in the ancient gods of their ancient race, who had fallen with Huayna Capac, the Great Inca, a year before Pizarro came raging into Peru. I knew the Quichua—the old tongue of the mother race—and so I learned more than I might have otherwise.

Yet I had not learned much. The Indios said that *something* had come into the mountains near Huascan. They were willing to talk about it, but they knew little. They shrugged with apathetic fatalism. *It* called the young virgins, no doubt for a sacrifice. *Quien sabe?* Certainly the strange, thickening fog was not of this earth. Never before in the history of mankind had there been such a fog. It was, of course, the earthquake that had brought the —the Visitant. And it was folly to seek it out.

Well, I was an anthropologist and knew the value of even such slight clues as this. Moreover, my job for the Foundation was done. My specimens had been sent through to Callao by pack-train, and my notes were safe with Fra Rafael. Also, I was young and the lure of far places and their mysteries was hot in my blood. I hoped I'd find something odd—even dangerous—at Huascan.

I was young. Therefore, somewhat of a fool . . .

The first night I camped in a little cave, sheltered from the wind and snug enough in my fleece-lined sleeping-bag. There were no insects at this height. It was impossible to make a fire for there was no wood. I worried a bit about the burro freezing in the night.

But he survived, and I repacked him the next morning with rather absurd cheerfulness. The fog was

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thick, yes, but not impenetrable.

There were tracks in the snow where the wind had not covered them. A girl had left the village the day before my arrival, which made my task all the easier. So I went up into that vast, desolate silence, the fog closing in steadily, getting thicker and thicker, the trail getting narrower until at last it was a mere track.

And then I was moving blind. I had to feel my way, step by step, leading the burro. Occasional tracks showed through the mist, showed that the native girl had walked swiftly—had run in places—so I assumed that the fog was less dense when she had come by this way. As it happened, I was quite wrong about that . . .

We were on a narrow path above a gorge when I lost the burro. I heard a scrambling and clashing of hoofs on rock behind me. The rope jerked out of my hand and the animal cried out almost articulately as it went over. I stood frozen, pressing against the stone, listening to the sound of the burro's fall. Finally the distant noise died in a faint trickling of snow and gravel that faded into utter silence. So thick was the fog that I had seen nothing.

I felt my way back to where the path had crumbled and rotten rock had given way under the burro's weight. It was possible for me to retrace my steps, but I did not. I was sure that my destination could not be much further. A lightly clad native girl could not have gone so far as Huascan itself. No, probably that day I would reach my goal.

So I went on, feeling my way through the thick silent fog. I was able to see only a few inches ahead of me for hours. Then, abruptly the trail grew clearer. Until, at last I was moving in the shadowless, unearthly mist over hard-packed snow, following the clearly marked footprints of a girl's sandals.

Then they vanished without warning, those prints, and I stood hesitant, staring around. I could see nothing, but a brighter glow in the misty canopy overhead marked the sun's position.

I knelt and brushed away the snow with my hands, hoping to undo the wind's concealing work. But I found no more footprints. Finally I took my bearings as well as I could and ploughed ahead in the general direction the girl had been traveling.

My compass told me I was heading due north.

The fog was a living, sentient thing now, secretive, shrouding the secret that lay beyond its gray wall.

Suddenly I was conscious of a change. An electric tingle coursed through my body. Abruptly the fog-wall brightened. Dimly, as through a translucent pane, I could make out vague images ahead of me.

I began to move toward the

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images—and suddenly the fog was gone!

Before me lay a valley. Blue-white moss carpeted it except where reddish boulders broke the blueness. Here and there were trees—at least I assumed they were trees, despite their unfamiliar outline. They were like banyans, having dozens of trunks narrow as bamboo. Blue-leafed, they stood like immense bird-cages on the pallid moss. The fog closed in behind the valley and above it. It was like being in a huge sun-lit cavern.

I turned my head, saw a gray wall behind me. Beneath my feet the snow was melting and running in tiny, trickling rivulets among the moss. The air was warm and stimulating as wine.

A strange and abrupt change. Impossibly strange! I walked toward one of the trees, stopped at a reddish boulder to examine it. And surprise caught at my throat. It was an artifact—a crumbling ruin, the remnant of an ancient structure whose original appearance I could not fathom. The stone seemed iron-hard. There were traces of inscription on it, but eroded to illegibility. And I never did learn the history of those enigmatic ruins . . . They did not originate on Earth.

There was no sign of the native girl, and the resilient moss retained no tracks. I stood there, staring around, wondering what to do now. I was tense with excitement. But there was little to see. Just that valley covering perhaps a half-mile before the fog closed in around it.

Beyond that—I did not know what lay beyond that.

I went on, into the valley, eyeing my surroundings curiously in the shadowless light that filtered through the shifting roof of fog. Foolishly, I expected to discover Incan artifacts. The crumbled red stones should have warned me. They were, I think, harder than metal, yet they had been here long enough for the elements to erode them into featureless shards. Had they been of earthly origin they would have antedated Mankind—antedated even the Neanderthaler man.

Curious how our minds are conditioned to run in anthropomorphic lines. I was, though I did not know it, walking through a land that had its beginnings outside the known universe. The blue trees hinted at that. The crimson ruins told me that clearly. The atmospheric conditions—the fog, the warmth high up in the Cordilleras—were certainly not natural. Yet I thought the explanation lay in some geological warp, volcanic activity, subterranean gas-vents . . .

My vision reached a half-mile, no farther. As I went on, the misty horizon receded. The valley was larger than I had imagined. It was like Elysium, where the shades of dead men stroll in the Garden of Proserpine. Streamlets

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ran through the blue moss at intervals, chill as death from the snowy plains hidden in the fog. "A sleepy world of streams . . ."

The ruins altered in appearance as I went on. The red blocks were still present, but there were now also remnants of other structures, made by a different culture, I thought.

The blue trees grew more numerous. Leafy vines covered most of them now, saffron-tinted, making each strange tree a little room, screened by the lattice of the vines. As I passed close to one a faint clicking sounded, incongruously like the tapping of typewriter keys, but muffled. I saw movement and turned, my hand going to the pistol in my belt.

The Thing came out of a tree-hut and halted, watching me. I *felt* it watching me—though *it had no eyes!*

It was a sphere of what seemed to be translucent plastic, glowing with shifting rainbow colors. And I sensed sentience—intelligence—in its horribly human attitude of watchful hesitation. Four feet in diameter it was, and featureless save for three ivory elastic tentacles that supported it and a fringe of long, whip-like cilia about its diameter—its waist, I thought.

It looked at me, eyeless and cryptic. The shifting colors crawled over the plastic globe. Then it began to roll forward on the three supporting tentacles with a queer, swift gliding motion. I stepped back, jerking out my gun and leveling it.

"Stop," I said, my voice shrill. "Stop!"

It stopped, quite as though it understood my words or the gesture of menace. The cilia fluttered about its spherical body. Bands of lambent color flashed. I could not rid myself of the curious certainty that it was trying to communicate with me.

Abruptly it came forward again purposefully. I tensed and stepped back, holding the gun aimed. My finger was tightening on the trigger when the Thing stopped.

I backed off, nervously tense, but the creature did not follow. After I had got about fifty yards away it turned back and retreated into the hut-like structure in the banyan tree. After that I watched the trees warily as I passed them, but there were no other visitations of that nature.

Scientists are reluctant to relinquish their so-called logic. As I walked I tried to rationalize the creature, to explain it in the light of current knowledge. That it had been alive was certain. Yet it was not protoplasmic in nature. A plant, developed by mutation? Perhaps. But that theory did not satisfy me for the Thing had possessed intelligence, though of what order I did not know.

But there were the seven native girls, I reminded myself. My job

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was to find them, and quickly, too.

I did, at last, find them. Six of them, anyway. They were sitting in a row on the blue moss, facing one of the red blocks of stone, their backs toward me. As I mounted a little rise I saw them, motionless as bronze statues, and as rigid.

I went down toward them, tense with excitement, expectancy. Odd that six native girls, sitting in a row, should fill me with such feeling. They were so motionless that I wondered as I approached them, if they were dead. . . .

But they were not. Nor were they—in the true sense of the word—alive.

I gripped one by the bare shoulder, found the flesh surprisingly cold and the girl seemed not to feel my touch. I swung her around to face me, and her black, empty eyes looked off into the far distance. Her lips were tightly compressed, slightly cyanosed. The pupils of her eyes were inordinately dilated, as if she was drugged.

Indian style, she squatted cross-legged, like the others. As I pulled her around, she toppled down on the moss, making no effort to stop herself. For a moment she lay there. Then with slow, puppet-like motions, she returned to her former position and resumed that blank staring into space.

I looked at the others. They were alike in their sleep-like withdrawal. It seemed as if their minds had been sucked out of them, that their very selves were elsewhere. It was a fantastic diagnosis, of course. But the trouble with those girls was nothing a physician could understand. It was psychic in nature, obviously.

I turned to the first one and slapped her cheeks. "Wake up!" I commanded. "You must obey me! Waken—"

But she gave no sign of feeling, of seeing. I lit a match, and her eyes focused on the flame. But the size of her pupils did not alter . . .

A shudder racked me. Then, abruptly I sensed movement behind me. I turned . . .

Over the blue moss the seventh Indio girl was coming toward us. "Miranda!" I said. "Can you hear me?" Fra Rafael had told me her name. Her feet, I saw, were bare and white frost-bite blotches marked them. But she did not seem to feel any pain as she walked.

Then I became aware that this was not a simple Indio girl. Something deep within my soul suddenly shrank back with instinctive revulsion. My skin seemed to crawl with a sort of terror. I began to shake so that it was difficult to draw my gun from its holster.

There was just this young native girl walking slowly toward me, her face quite expressionless, her

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black eyes fixed on emptiness. Yet she was not like other Indios, not like the six other girls sitting behind me. I can only liken her to a lamp in which a hot flame burned. The others were lamps that were dead, unlit.

The flame in her was not one that had been kindled on this earth, or in this universe, or in this space-time continuum, either. There was life in the girl who had been Miranda Valle—but it was not *human* life!

Some distant, skeptical corner of my brain told me that this was pure insanity, that I was deluded, hallucinated. Yes, I knew that. But it did not seem to matter. The girl who was walking so quietly across the blue yielding moss had wrapped about her, like an invisible, intangible veil, something of the alienage that men, through the eons, have called divinity. No mere human, I thought, could touch her.

But I felt fear, loathing—emotions not associated with divinity. I watched, knowing that presently she would look at me, would realize my presence. Then—well, my mind would not go beyond that point . . .

She came forward and quietly seated herself with the others, at the end of the line. Her body stiffened rigidly. Then, the veil of terror seemed to leave her, like a cloak falling away. Abruptly she was just an Indio girl, empty and drained as the others, mindless and motionless.

The girl beside her rose suddenly with a slow, fluid motion. And the crawling horror hit me again . . . The Alien Power had not left! It had merely transferred itself to another body!

And this second body was as dreadful to my senses as the first had been. In some subtlely monstrous way its terror impressed itself on my brain, though all the while there was nothing overt, nothing *visibly* wrong. The strange landscape, bounded by fog, was not actually abnormal, considering its location, high in the Andes. The blue moss, the weird trees; they were strange, but possible. Even the seven native girls were a normal part of the scene. It was the sense of an alien presence that caused my terror—a fear of the unknown. . . .

As the newly "possessed" girl rose, I turned and fled, deathly sick, feeling caught in the grip of nightmare. Once I stumbled and fell. As I scrambled wildly to my feet I looked back.

The girl was watching me, her face tiny and far away. Then, suddenly, abruptly it was close. She stood within a few feet of me! I had not moved nor seen her move, but we were all close together again—the seven girls and I . . .

Hypnosis? Something of that sort. She had drawn me back to

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her, my mind blacked out and unresisting. I could not move. I could only stand motionless while that Alien being dwelling within human flesh reached out and thrust frigid fingers into my soul. I could feel my mind laid open, spread out like a map before the inhuman gaze that scanned it. It was blasphemous and shameful, and I could not move or resist!

I was flung aside as the psychic grip that held me relaxed. I could not think clearly. That remote delving into my brain had made me blind, sick, frantic. I remember running . . .

But I remember very little of what followed. There are vague pictures of blue moss and twisted trees, of coiling fog that wrapped itself about me, trying futilely to hold me back. And always there was the sense of a dark and nameless horror just beyond vision, hidden from me—though I was not hidden from its eyeless gaze!

I remember reaching the wall of fog, saw it loomed before me, plunged into it, raced through cold grayness, snow crunching beneath my boots. I recall emerging again into that misty valley of Abaddon . . .

When I regained complete consciousness I was with Lhar.

A coolness as of limpid water moved through my mind, cleansing it, washing away the horror, soothing and comforting me. I was lying on my back looking up at an arabesque pattern of blue and saffron; gray-silver light filtered through a lacy filigree. I was still weak but the blind terror no longer gripped me.

I was inside a hut formed by the trunks of one of the banyan-like trees. Slowly, weakly I rose on one elbow. The room was empty except for a curious flower that grew from the dirt floor beside me. I looked at it dazedly.

And so I met Lhar . . . She was of purest white, the white of alabaster, but with a texture and warmth that stone does not have. In shape—well, she seemed to be a great flower, an unopened tulip-like blossom five feet or so tall. The petals were closely enfolded, concealing whatever sort of body lay hidden beneath, and at the base was a convoluted pedestal that gave the odd impression of a ruffled, tiny skirt. Even now I cannot describe Lhar coherently. A flower, yes—but very much more than that. Even in that first glimpse I knew that Lhar was more than just a flower . . .

I was not afraid of her. She had saved me, I knew, and I felt complete trust in her. I lay back as she spoke to me telepathically, her words and thoughts forming within my brain. . . .

"You are well now, though still weak. But it is useless for you to try to escape from this valley. No one can escape. The Other has powers I do not know, and those powers will keep you here."

I said, "You are—?"

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A name formed within my mind. "Lhar. I am not of your world."

A shudder shook her. And her distress forced itself on me. I stood up, swaying with weakness. Lhar drew back, moving with a swaying, bobbing gait oddly like a curtsey.

Behind me a clicking sounded. I turned, saw the many-colored sphere force itself through the banyan-trunks. Instinctively my hand went to my gun. But a thought from Lhar halted me.

"It will not harm you. It is my servant." She hesitated, groping for a word. "A machine. A robot. It will not harm you."

I said, "Is it intelligent?"

"Yes. But it is not alive. Our people made it. We have many such machines."

The robot swayed toward me, the rim of cilia flashing and twisting. Lhar said, "It speaks thus, without words or thought . . . " She paused, watching the sphere, and I sensed dejection in her manner.

The robot turned to me. The cilia twisted lightly about my arm, tugging me toward Lhar. I said, "What does it want?"

"It knows that I am dying," Lhar said.

That shocked me. "Dying? No!"

"It is true. Here in this alien world I do not have my usual food. So I will die. To survive I need the blood of mammals. But there are none here save those seven the Other has taken. And I cannot use them for they are now spoiled."

I didn't ask Lhar what sort of mammals she had in her own world. "That's what the robot wanted when it tried to stop me before, isn't it?"

"He wanted you to help me, yes. But you are weak from the shock you have had. I cannot ask you—"

I said, "How much blood do you need?"

At her answer, I said, "All right. You saved my life; I must do the same for you. I can spare that much blood easily. Go ahead."

She bowed toward me, a fluttering white flame in the dimness of the tree-room. A tendril flicked out from among her petals, wrapped itself about my arm. It felt cool, gentle as a woman's hand. I felt no pain.

"You must rest now," Lhar said. "I will go away but I shall not be long."

The robot clicked and chattered, shifting on its tentacle legs. I watched it, saying, "Lhar, this can't be true. Why am I—believing impossible things?"

"I have given you peace," she told me. "Your mind was dangerously close to madness. I have drugged you a little, physically; so your emotions will not be strong for a while. It was necessary to save your sanity."

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It was true that my mind felt —was drugged the word? My thoughts were clear enough, but I felt as if I were submerged in transparent but dark water. There was an odd sense of existing in a dream. I remembered Swinburne's lines:

Here, where the world is quiet,
Here, where all trouble seems
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
In doubtful dreams of dreams. . . .

"What is this place?" I asked.

Lhar bent toward me. "I do not know if I can explain. It is not quite clear to me. The robot knows. He is a reasoning machine. Wait. . . . . " She turned to the sphere. Its cilia fluttered in quick, complicated signals.

Lhar turned back to me. "Do you know much of the nature of Time? That it is curved, moves in a spiral . . . "

She went on to explain, but much of her explanation I did not understand. Yet I gathered enough to realize that this valley was not of Earth. Or, rather, it was not of the earth I knew.

"You have geological disturbances, I know. The strata are tumbled about, mixed one with another—"

I remembered what Fra Rafael had said about an earthquake, three months before. Lhar nodded toward me.

"But this was a time-slip. The space-time continuum is also subject to great strains and stresses. It buckled, and strata—Time-sectors—were thrust up to mingle with others. This valley belongs to another age, as do I and the machine, and also—the Other."

She told me what had happened . . . There had been no warning. One moment she had been in her own World, her own Time. The next, she was here, with her robot. And with the Other . . .

"I do not know the origin of the Other. I may have lived in either your future or your past. This valley, with its ruined stone structures, is probably part of your future. I had never heard of such a place before. The Other may be of the future also. Its shape I do not know . . ."

She told me more, much more. The Other, as she called it—giving the entity a thought-form that implied complete alienage—had a strangely chameleon-like method of feeding. It lived on life-force, as well as I could understand, draining the vital powers of a mammal vampirically. And it assumed the shape of its prey as it fed. It was not possession, in the strict sense of the word. It was a sort of merging . . .

Humanity is inclined to invest all things with its own attributes, forgetting that outside the limitations of time and space and size,

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familiar laws of nature do not apply.

So even now I do not know all that lay behind the terror in that Peruvian valley. This much I learned: the Other, like Lhar and her robot, had been cast adrift by a time-slip, and thus marooned here. There was no way for it to return to its normal Time-sector. It had created the fog-wall to protect itself from the direct rays of the sun, which threatened its existence.

Sitting there in the filigreed, silver twilight beside Lhar, I had a concept of teeming universes of space-time, of an immense spiral of lives and civilizations, races and cultures, covering an infinite cosmos. And yet—what had happened? Very little, in that inconceivable infinity. A rift in time, a dimensional slip—and a sector of land and three beings on it had been wrenched from their place in time and transported to *our* time-stratum.

A robot, a flower that was alive and intelligent—and feminine—and the Other . . .

"The native girls," I said. "What will happen to them?"

"They are no longer alive," Lhar told me. "They still move and breathe, but they are dead, sustained only by the life-force of the Other. I do not think it will harm me. Apparently it prefers other food."

"That's why you've stayed here?" I asked.

The shining velvety calyx swayed. "I shall die soon. For a little while I thought that I might manage to survive in this alien world, this alien time. Your blood has helped." The cool tentacle withdrew from my arm. "But I lived in a younger time, where space was filled with—with certain energizing vibratory principles.

"They have faded now almost to nothing, to what you call cosmic rays. And these are too weak to maintain my life. No, I must die. And then my poor robot will be alone." I sensed elfin amusement in that last thought. "It seems absurd to you that I should think affectionately of a machine. But in our world there is a rapport—a mental symbiosis—between robot and living beings."

There was a silence. After a while I said, "I'd better get out of here. Get help—to end the menace of the other . . ." What sort of help I did not know. Was the Other vulnerable?

Lhar caught my thought. "In its own shape it is vulnerable, but what that shape is I do not know. As for your escaping from this valley—you cannot. The fog will bring you back."

"I've got my compass." I glanced at it, saw that the needle was spinning at random.

Lhar said: "The Other has many powers. Whenever you go into the fog, you will always return here."

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"How do you know all this?" I asked.

"My robot tells me. A machine can reason logically, better than a colloid brain."

I closed my eyes, trying to think. Surely it should not be difficult for me to retrace my steps, to find a path out of this valley. Yet I hesitated, feeling a strange impotence.

"Can't your robot guide me?" I persisted.

"He will not leave my side. Perhaps—" Lhar turned to the sphere, and the cilia fluttered excitedly. "No," she said, turning back to me. "Built into his mind is one rule—never to leave me. He cannot disobey that."

I couldn't ask Lhar to go with me. Somehow I sensed that the frigid cold of the surrounding mountains would destroy her swiftly. I said, "It must be possible for me to get out of here. I'm going to try, anyway."

"I will be waiting," she said, and did not move as I slipped out between two trunks of the banyan-like tree.

It was daylight and the silvery grayness overhead was palely luminous. I headed for the nearest rampart of fog.

Lhar was right. Each time I went into that cloudy fog barrier I was blinded. I crept forward step by step, glancing behind me at my footprints in the snow, trying to keep in a straight line. And presently I would find myself back in the valley . . .

I must have tried a dozen times before giving up. There were no landmarks in that all-concealing grayness, and only by sheerest chance would anyone blunder into this valley—unless hypnotically summoned, like the Indio girls.

I realized that I was trapped. Finally I went back to Lhar. She hadn't moved an inch since I had left, nor had the robot, apparently.

"Lhar," I said. "Lhar, can't you help me?"

The white flame of the flower was motionless, but the robot's cilia moved in quick signals. Lhar moved at last.

"Perhaps," her thought came. "Unless both induction and deduction fail, my robot has discovered a chance for you. The Other can control your mind through emotions. But I, too, have some power over your mind. If I give you strength, wall you with a psychic shield against intrusion, you may be able to face the Other. But you cannot destroy it unless it is in its normal shape. The Indio girls must be killed first . . ."

"Killed?" I felt a sense of horror at the thought of killing those poor simple native girls.

"They are not actually alive now. They are now a part of the Other. They can never be restored to their former life."

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"How will—destroying them—help me?" I asked.

Again Lhar consulted the robot. "The Other will be driven from their bodies. It will then have no hiding-place and must resume its own form. Then it can be slain."

Lhar swayed and curtseyed away. "Come," she said. "It is in my mind that the Other must die. It is evil, ruthlessly selfish, which is the same thing. Until now I have not realized the solution to this evil being. But seeing into your thoughts has clarified my own. And my robot tells me that unless I aid you, the Other will continue ravening into your world. If that happens, the time-pattern will be broken. . . . I do not quite understand, but my robot makes no mistakes. The Other must die . . ."

She was outside of the banyan now, the sphere gliding after her. I followed. The three of us moved swiftly across the blue moss, guided by the robot.

In a little while we came to where the six Indio girls were squatting. They had apparently not moved since I had left them.

"The Other is not here," Lhar said.

The robot held me back as Lhar advanced toward the girls, the skirt-like frill at her base convoluting as she moved. She paused beside them and her petals trembled and began to unfold.

From the tip of that great blossom a fountain of white dust spurted up. Spores or pollen, it seemed to be. The air was cloudy with the whiteness.

The robot drew me back, back again. I sensed danger . . .

The pollen seemed to be drawn toward the Indios, spun toward them in dancing mist-motes. It settled on their bronzed bodies, their limbs and faces. It covered them like a veil until they appeared to be six statues, white as cold marble, there on the blue moss.

Lhar's petals lifted and closed again. She swayed toward me, her mind sending a message into mine.

"The Other has no refuge now," she told me. "I have slain the—the girls."

"They're dead?" My lips were dry.

"What semblance of life they had left is now gone. The Other cannot use them again."

Lhar swayed toward me. A cool tentacle swept out, pressing lightly on my forehead. Another touched my breast, above the heart.

"I give you of my strength," Lhar said. "It will be as shield and buckler to you. The rest of the way you must go alone . . ."

Into me tide of power flowed. I sank into cool depths, passionless and calm. Something was entering my body, my mind and soul, drowning my fears, stiffening my resolve.

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Strength of Lhar was now my strength!

The tentacles dropped away, their work done. The robot's cilia signalled and Lhar said, "Your way lies there. That temple—do you see it?"

I saw it. Far in the distance, half shrouded by the fog, a scarlet structure, not ruined like the others, was visible.

"You will find the Other there. Slay the last Indio, then destroy the Other."

I had no doubt now of my ability to do that. A new power seemed to lift me from my feet, send me running across the moss. Once I glanced back, to see Lhar and her robot standing motionless, watching me.

The temple enlarged as I came nearer. It was built of the same reddish stone as the other ruined blocks I had seen. But erosion had weathered its harsh angles till nothing now remained but a rounded, smoothly sculptured monolith, twenty feet tall, shaped like a rifle shell.

A doorway gaped in the crimson wall. I paused for a moment on the threshold. In the dimness within a shadow stirred. I stepped forward, finding myself in a room that was tall and narrow, the ceiling hidden in gloom. Along the walls were carvings I could not clearly see. They gave a suggestion of inhuman beings that watched.

It was dark but I could see the Indio girl who had been Miranda Valle. Her eyes were on me, and, even through the protecting armor of Lhar strength, I could feel their terrible power.

The life in the girl was certainly not human!

"Destroy her!" my mind warned. "Destroy her! Quickly!"

But as I hesitated a veil of darkness seemed to fall upon me. Utter cold, a frigidity as of outer space, lanced into my brain. My senses reeled under the assault. Desperately, blind and sick and giddy, I called on the reserve strength Lhar had given me. Then I blacked out . . .

When I awoke I saw smoke coiling up from the muzzle of the pistol in my hand. At my feet lay the Indio girl, dead. My bullet had crashed into her brain, driving out the terrible dweller there.

My eyes were drawn to the farther wall. An archway gaped there. I walked across the room, passed under the archway. Instantly I was in complete, stygian darkness. But I was not alone!

The power of the Other struck me like a tangible blow. I have no words to tell of an experience so completely disassociated from human memories. I remember only this: my mind and soul were sucked down into a black abyss where I had no volition or consciousness. It was another dimension of the mind where my senses were altered . . .

Nothing existed there but the

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intense blackness beyond time and space. I could not see the Other nor conceive of it. It was pure intelligence, stripped of flesh. It was alive and it had power—power that was god-like.

There in the great darkness I stood alone, unaided, sensing the approach of an entity from some horribly remote place where all values were altered.

I sensed Lhar's nearness. "Hurry!" her thought came to me. "Before it wakens!"

Warmth flowed into me. The blackness receded . . .

Against the farther wall something lay, a thing bafflingly human . . . a great-headed thing with a tiny pallid body coiled beneath it. It was squirming toward me. . . .

"Destroy it!" Lhar communicated.

The pistol in my hand thundered, bucking against my palm. Echoes roared against the walls. I fired and fired again until the gun was empty . . .

"It is dead," Lahr's thought entered my mind.

I stumbled, dropped the pistol.

"It was the child of an old super-race—a child not yet born."

Can you conceive of such a race? Where even the unborn had power beyond human understanding? My mind wondered what the adult Alien must be.

I shivered, suddenly cold. An icy wind gusted through the temple. Lhar's thought was clear in my mind.

"Now the valley is no longer a barrier to the elements. The Other created fog and warmth to protect itself. Now it is dead and your world reclaims its own."

From the outer door of the temple I could see the fog being driven away by a swift wind. Snow was falling slowly, great white flakes that blanketed the blue moss and lay like caps on the red shards that dotted the valley.

"I shall die swiftly and easily now, instead of slowly, by starvation," Lhar said.

A moment later a thought crossed my mind, faint and intangible as a snowflake and I knew Lhar was saying goodbye.

I left the valley. Once I looked back, but there was only a veil of snow behind me.

And out of the greatest adventure the cosmic gods ever conceived—only this: For a little while the eternal veil of time was ripped away and the door to the unknown was held ajar.

But now the door is closed once more. Below Huascan a robot guards a tomb, that is all.

The snow fell faster. Shivering, I ploughed through the deepening drifts. My compass needle pointed north. The spell that had enthralled the valley was gone.

Half an hour later I found the trail, and the road to safety lay open before me. Fra Rafael would be waiting to hear my story.

But I did not think that he would believe it . . .

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universe in bcoks

by . . . Robert Frazier

A noted expert presents a critical appraisal of the new hard-covered fantasy and science fiction books.

E PLURIBUS UNICORN by Theodore Sturgeon, Abelard Press, New York, $2.75.

At the highly imaginative age of nineteen Sturgeon wrote his best fantasy short story, the widely acclaimed "Bianca's Hands"—a jolting tale of a boy's strange love for an idiot girl's beautiful yet murderous hands. Now, seventeen years and fifty stories later, this pasha-bearded ex-bulldozer operator has been unable to surpass his early prize-winning effort. Nevertheless, the thirteen short stories in his newest anthology clearly proclaim that he is still a master of the weird, the supernatural, the horrible, the uncompromisingly fantastic.

The present collection reveals his fondness for the deadly ironic switch at the end; hilarious, ribald farces; grotesque tales of ghoulish terror; and sombre stories of sudden doom.

But Sturgeon also writes tender and ethereally lovely tales woven with sheer scintillating lyric poetry —often in one and the same tale of sweating terror. He employs a

Author-critic-teacher-editor Robert Frazier, who again brings you a rundown on the newest science fiction books, is the Instructor of the "Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Workshop" at the College of the City of New York, Extension Division. His course met with such acclaim last fall, it is being repeated in the Spring Term beginning the evening of March 11th. Who said science fiction isn't an integral part of the mainstream of modern literature? His voice on new books is authoritative.

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style which is a kind of poetry in prose, admirably suited to his themes. All his tales seem to radiate an aura of fantasy which transports you over an almost indefinable boundary line of reality into the realm of the supernatural. So subtly does he achieve his strongly emotional effects that you will remember, frequently with horror, most of these stories long after you have finished them.

"A Saucer of Loneliness" which ranks second only to "Bianca's Hands" is particularly memorable. It is a poignant tale of the ugliest woman on earth and how she learned there was someone even lonelier than she—a homely, club-footed lighthouse keeper. "The Silken-Swift" (third best) exploits a theme which Sturgeon has long toyed with: would a unicorn ever allow himself to be caught by a girl who, although not a virgin, is, nonetheless, deserving?

In the well-written, unforgettable "Cellmate," Crawley's diminutive twin brother exerts a criminal-minded hypnotic power. Only the top part of him grew (like a Siamese twin) out of Crawley's over-size chest. Crawley "obeyed that brother of his —and so did everybody else." Syzygy (an ecstatic non-sexual interflow between the nuclei of two symbiotic human-like creatures) is movingly depicted in "The Sex Opposite." In another tale, a cat named Fluffy is memorable as a modern-day Tobermory—yet so much more evil that by comparison his counterpart seems whimsical. Here, too, is the notorious "World Well Lost" which created a sensation when it first appeared in magazine format.

In addition, the Appendix will prove of great value to collectors because it lists all of Sturgeon's short stories, indicating where they were originally published and anthologized.

CONJURE WIFE by Fritz Leiber, Twayne Publishers, New York, $2.75.

What happens when a passionate, sexually frustrated, 70-year-old woman takes over the body of a beautiful, vibrant young wife? What would be the youthful husband's reaction?

"Don't you see, Norman? She wants my body. Haven't you ever noticed the way she looks at you, Norman? She desires you, Norman, that foul old woman desires you and she wants to love you in my body. She wants to possess my body and to leave my soul trapped in that withered old walkingstick body of hers, leave my soul to die in her filthy flesh. And she's coming here *now* to do it, she's coming here *now*."

Fritz Leiber explores this psychological question in his melodrama of modern witchcraft and black magic. It is an exciting, well-balanced blend of fantasy and science fiction. A shorter, less-polished version originally ap-

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peared in a magazine eleven years ago.

THE GREEN MILLENNIUM by Fritz Leiber, Abelard Press, New York, $2.75.

The author of the noteworthy series of prehistoric adventure fantasies (of the Howard-Dunsany type) about Fafhrd & Gray Mouser—one of the purest kinds of straight entertainment stories—now introduces a beneficent green cat from outer space who involves the hero, Phil, in a grotesque world peopled with extraordinary personalities. Just what the cat is and its ultimate meaning is the secret of Leiber's new, original novel. You'll enjoy it.

MORE THAN HUMAN by Theodore Sturgeon, Farrar, Straus & Young, N. Y., $2.00; Ballantine Books, 35¢.

Theodore Sturgeon is at his very best when he explores the nightmarish spector of devastating loneliness which haunts so many of us today. He has reached into the deep recesses of the human heart and extracted the livid core therefrom. His is a sensitive, daringly conceived story of six utterly lonely people who discover that each possesses a unique and wonderful talent only when they mesh themselves into one personality. They learn to work together like parts of a perfectly engineered machine. Together they can do anything. They think of themselves as "I" not "we"—because in a curious way they are one. That is the source of their strength. This is the story of how they met, and what they became . . . and what they intend to do.

The middle portion of this provocative full-length novel is based on Sturgeon's famous "Baby Is Three"—first published in a magazine in 1952. This book does credit to the man who has written such milestones of fantasy as "It," "Microcosmic Gods" and "Maturity." It is well and sympathetically told with deft, consistent characterization and excellent handling of language. Well worth owning.

THE TRITONIAN RING by L. Sprague de Camp, Twayne Publishers, New York, $2.95.

Replete with sex and swashbuckling cloak-and-dagger swordplay, the myths and legends of a prehistoric bronze age have been drawn upon for an action-packed fantasy of a primitive culture rising from the surrounding savagery of sadism, sorcery and headless zombies. There's a plethora of giants, dwarfs, witches, wizards, Amazons, lush princesses, sexy uninhibited Queens and a tentacled god or two.

Gallant Prince Vakar of Lorsk (a kingdom on the sinking Pusadian Continent) sets forth to seek the thing the gods of the West most fear, without even knowing what it is. These gods have plotted

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to assassinate Vakar before the events in which he is destined to play a part result in their own overthrow. His galloping quest takes him to the lair of the world's greatest wizard who reveals: "The thing the gods most fear is the Ring of the Tritons."

This traditional magic ring of great power will save Lorsk from conquest by the Gorgons. Vakar valiantly fights his way out of many supernatural dangers closing in on him, including nude gladiatorial combat with a huge subhuman apeman in the land of Gamphasantia where he has been arrested for the deadly crime of being a foreigner, trespassing, carrying a sword and wearing clothes.

"The Tritonian Ring" and its three companion Pusadian tales originally appeared in magazine format in 1951 and 1953. It is de Camp's eighteenth such type novel since 1940 when he and Fletcher Pratt started a whole cycle of adventure-fantasies based upon Norse myth. Unfortunately, this one is mediocre, and lacks Sprague de Camp's usual inventiveness.

ATTACK FROM ATLANTIS by Lester del Rey, The John C. Winston Co., Phila., Pa. $2.00.

With the conquest of Mt. Everest, we thought there were no new frontiers to explore on earth. But not Lester del Rey, whose "Marooned on Mars" was the first science fiction novel to win the Boys' Clubs of America Award. For he perceived that we still know little about the ocean bottom—over six miles straight down. Seven-tenths of our Earth is covered with water. "We keep fishing up forms of life which we thought were extinct for 300 million years. Down there, nobody told them about being dead, so they go right on as always."

The new atomic-powered submarine is used to explore what lies hidden beneath the mysterious sea. The crew discover the mythical lost city of Atlantis—Plato's most important contribution to science fiction, described in his dialogues "Timaios" and "Kritias." Plato tells of a large island in the Atlantic, ruled by descendants of Poseidon from the rich capital city of Atlantis. The Atlanteans tried to conquer the whole Mediterranean region (9,000 years before Plato) but were repulsed by Athenians. Then Zeus, to punish the Atlanteans for their pride and avarice, sank the whole continent beneath the ocean. Despite clear geological and archeological evidence to the contrary, the lost continent has become a standard theme of modern imaginative fiction. And Lester does not do anything unusual with it in this novel for teen-agers.

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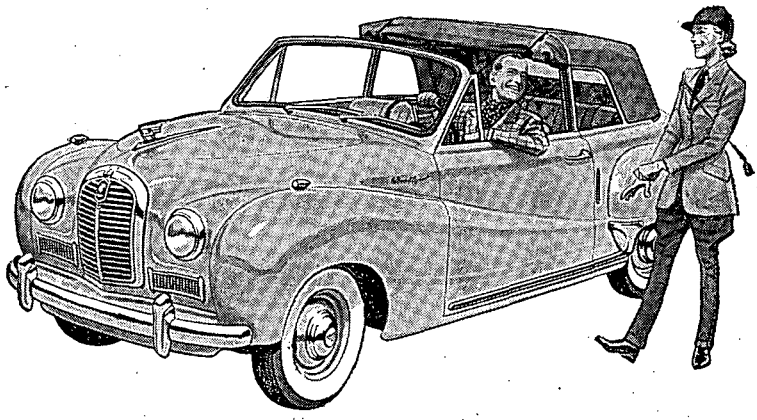
Austin announces a new convertible



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